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textphone 08000 967 968**W:** www.unison-yorks.org.uk

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Editor

Barrie Clement

Consulting Editor

Mary Maguire

Chief Photographer

Jim Varney

ContributorsChristine Buckley, Peter Carroll,
Amanda Dixon, Ryan Fletcher, Tom
Jones, Mary Maguire, Annie Mitchell
and Paul Routledge**Cover Image**

Jim Varney

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Alban Row, 27-31 Verulam Road
St. Albans, Herts AL3 4DG**T:** 01727 893 894**F:** 01727 893 895**E:** enquiries@centurypublishing.uk**W:** www.centurypublishing.uk**Advertising enquiries**

David Murray

T: 01727 739 182**E:** d.murray@centurypublishing.uk**Design and Layout**

Caroline Jakobsson

T: 01727 739 189**E:** copy@centurypublishing.uk**Printed by**

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

WE STAND READY

We are living through a period of real uncertainty - but also one of opportunity for public service workers and our communities.

At last month's general election, Theresa May clearly lost her mandate to run the country. Her attempts to pursue what could be a disastrous deal with the DUP showed us all that her rhetoric about coalitions of chaos was all talk - she will do whatever it takes to stay in power.

Meanwhile, Labour surpassed the expectations of the cynics and put Jeremy

Corbyn within reach of Downing Street - a result that showed us that hope, optimism and a positive offer is what a huge proportion of the British people want.

Jeremy also showed the naysayers who argued that standing up for what UNISON believes in - real investment in public services, proper pay rises, decent affordable homes and services that deliver for our communities - was what a large part of the electorate were looking for.

Labour may not have won the election, but a Labour government is now in sight. So your union will use this opportunity - an opportunity for which we have fought. As long as the Tories cling to power, we will fight for our agenda line by line and vote by vote in Parliament. But we will also stand ready to support Labour when another election is called, and ensure that UNISON's agenda is at the heart of a Labour government's strategy.

We've never been stronger

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

The Tory Party threw vast amounts of money at Theresa May's disastrous general election campaign,

courtesy of the same business and financial network which crashed the global economy

in 2008.

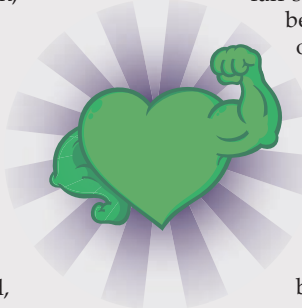
The right wing press was as ever almost demented in its support for the Tories and, as we all witnessed, the BBC unfailingly followed their lead throughout.

Yet for all their money and influence the corporate powers that be, not only failed to deliver the expected Tory landslide, they didn't even get a majority.

Our members have played a hugely important role during this campaign,

and for the years leading up to it. They are the champions of good public services and of a decent and fair society that values human beings above the greed of powerful elites. They embody everything that is best about this country. Without the personal time and effort UNISON members put in during this election the outcome could have been far worse and I am very proud of the results achieved in our region.

Now, as the Tories desperately scratch around for support to prop up their appalling regime, the rest of us are preparing to step up the fight for public services and against further Tory privatisation. We have never been stronger than we are now.



Fight to defend union cash lifeline

Regional secretary John Cafferty is contacting major employers throughout the region to make sure they are still prepared to operate the 'check-off' system whereby union subs are deducted directly from wages.

From March 10, 2018, new Tory legislation states that agreements have to be in place to ensure a 'reasonable fee' is paid to public sector employers who co-operate with the system, also known as DOCAS (deduction of contributions at source).

John said that so far responses from the regional employers had been promising, 'with very little uncertainty'. The Trade Union Act 2016 stipulates that the so-called 'service agreements' have to be in

place by the March 2018 deadline.

UNISON's head office is currently drafting a model agreement that will incorporate the necessary revisions.

John said the new blueprint would be sent to organisers and branches as soon as possible, but regional organisers will be discussing check-off arrangements with branches over the coming weeks.

Said John: "If an employer doesn't agree to continue with DOCAS we may need to convert members to direct debit collection. Consequently further approaches to employers may be required, which will be discussed between regional organisers and branches.

"UNISON will also

be contacting smaller employers throughout the public sector with a view to reaching similar agreements; your regional organisers therefore will be talking to branches with the aim of engaging these employers in discussions."

Originally the

Government wanted to introduce a law preventing public sector employers co-operating with check-off, but a campaign by UNISON and the TUC in the House of Lords persuaded ministers to drop the ban provided it did not represent a cost to the employers.



John Cafferty

EVENTS DIARY 2017 July – September

LGBT PRIDE

Saturday 22 July, Hull

Bradford Festival

Weekend of 28-30 July

UNISON Doncaster Race Day

Saturday 5 August
Doncaster Race Course

More in Common (Hope not Hate Bradford)

Saturday 5 August (12 noon – 3pm)
Centenary Square, Bradford

Leeds Pride

Saturday 5 and Sunday 6 August, Leeds

South Yorkshire Festival

Sunday 13 August (12 noon – 5pm)
Wortley Hall, Wortley
Sheffield S35 7DB

Hull Freedom Festival

Friday 1 to Sunday 3 September (including
Trades Council Youth Concert)
Queens Gardens, Hull

Rotherham Show (Branch-based event.

Region in support role only)
Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 September
Clifton Park, Clifton Lane, Rotherham S65 2AA



Union warns of indefinite strike

Around 80 members of UNISON at the Foundation organisation took four days of strike action starting on May 30 over their employer's proposal to cut payments for sickness and redundancy.

Foundation is an organisation helping and supporting people to

manage a tenancy, find a job, tackle addictions and improve relationships.

UNISON had been in talks with the employers about their plans because they would have a 'devastating' effect on some of the lowest paid staff in the sector.

Following the successful industrial action - which affected

services across Yorkshire including Leeds, Wakefield, Scarborough, Kirklees, and Calderdale - the employer has indicated a readiness to talk but not to shift on the proposed cuts.

Branch organiser Tim Vincent said Foundation could face indefinite action unless it was prepared to negotiate.

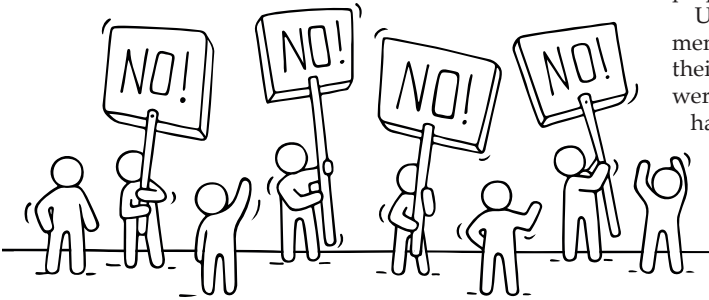
Under the proposals members would have their pay cut if they were sick and would have their redundancy entitlement cut by thousands of pounds.

The lowest paid

workers in Foundation do a 40-hour week for little more than the legal minimum wage.

Ian Hirst, a support worker and UNISON steward, said: "We have tried to find a solution to the current impasse but management appear to be hell-bent on implementing their proposals. Our members are not going to stand idly by and just take these cuts on the chin."

UNISON has met regularly with management and arbitration service ACAS has been involved.



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ELECTION ANYONE?



With another general election a possibility, you have to wonder what Brenda of Bristol would make of it. **Mary Maguire** on a media feeding frenzy

There's nothing like a snap election to inspire a burst of apathy. Brenda from Bristol summed up the pain of a nation as she groaned: "You're joking. Not another one. Oh, for God's sake. Honestly, I can't stand this. There is too much politics going on at the moment".

Editors were in seventh heaven. No problem filling blank pages or broadcast seconds now. The twitterati hailed her as 'Britain's best political commentator' and 'the voice of the nation'. CNN turned her into a global phenomenon with news of UK 'election fatigue'.

Writing in the Yorkshire Post, Andrew Vine's attempt to answer the question 'Too much politics?', concluded there was too little.

And the media kept it that way. Deluded politicians believe that an election gives the voters a chance to scrutinise their policies and their record and decide accordingly. No. An election is a big story for the media. And stories are about people doing things. With pictures. Lots of pictures. Pontificators are dusted down and allowed to ramble along at tedious length. Pollsters prance about with their latest toy. And snappers dog the footsteps of the leading players to get that embarrassing photo.

MUDDLE

An elite, but elusive, cabal of reporters and their snappers, are despatched to the four corners. Their mission: the popular spectator sport: gaffewatch.

How we love to laugh at politicians making a hash of things. From Labour's Diane Abbott in a muddle over police funding on live radio (Calendar News, BBC Yorks, et al) to Tory Amber Rudd mouthing off about food banks, to Jeremy Corbyn declaring 'the Tories are hopelessly divided

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A BIT OF
POLICY
ESCAPES
AND
RACES
AROUND
NEWS
ROOMS
”

on this silly cap', while wearing, yes, you guessed it (York Press).

Theresa May went to Wales and said she wanted Britain to 'lead the world in preventing tourism'. Even the Whitby Gazette thought that a step too far.

She then went to Cornwall to munch her way through a large bag of chips. Thankfully, mastication prevented her from saying anything. The BBC filmed the whole episode. Talks are taking place about turning it into a series. Snappers fell over each other to record the image which found itself as far away as the Hull Daily Mail, amongst others.

Still, it's not really a patch on the 'Ed Miliband eating a bacon buttie' sketch.

Ed made a cameo appearance to show off his gardening skills by mowing a voter's lawn in Arksey. He received mixed reviews. Dubbed the 'Lawn Ranger' by the Telegraph & Argus and 'green-fingered' by House Beautiful, but the Daily Star said he did a rubbish job and didn't even know how to switch it on.

Occasionally, a bit of policy escapes and races around news rooms like a frightened rabbit. Manifesto launches are cases in point. The media pitches up and, whilst fighting for space, a policy sneaks out.

I don't know what Yorkshire did to deserve it, but both Labour and Tories decided it would be a good thing to launch their manifestos in God's own county.

The Tories travelled en masse to pester the good people of Halifax with their 'strong and stable' message. Labour sought out the many in Bradford. And the LibDems, Greens and UKIP favoured London.

But the big news of course, was that the Tories' hopes of forming a government with a thumping majority were dashed by the fickle electorate. Still, better luck next time eh? And we won't have long to wait. Election fever, don't you love it? ■



Mary Maguire

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£2,001–£5,000	£3.50
£5,001–£8,000	£5.30
£8,001–£11,000	£6.60
£11,001–£14,000	£7.85
£14,001–£17,000	£9.70
£17,001–£20,000	£11.50
£20,001–£25,000	£14.00
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£30,001–£35,000	£20.30
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BOWLING 'EM OVER

Nominated as one of UNISON's Public Service Champions, Liz Bailey (*right*) is a one woman dynamo who lives her life to the full. **Ryan Fletcher** reports

Liz Bailey (*right*) is one of those enviable people capable of managing any number of roles.

Aside from her busy job evaluating pay and grading at Leeds City Council for UNISON, the sheer number of out-of-work commitments Liz has would exhaust the average person.

The 44-year-old captains a crown green bowling team, administers the second and third Cleckheaton cricket teams and is vice-chair of her local sports club.

"My daughter, Alex, plays football and I ended up on the Huddersfield Town ladies committee as well. I started helping with the cricket because my son, Sam, plays. I'm one of those people who ends up organising things," explained Liz.

"My husband, Mark, always puts me forward whenever there's an issue. He's always the first to say when something's not working properly 'should you get involved?' He's very encouraging of my need to help sort things out."

Nor is it just Mark who knows Liz is a born problem solver. She has also been named as a UNISON Public Service Champion for her vital work in helping to defend members against the worst effects of the budget cuts at Leeds City Council.

Liz's aptitude for multitasking means she is able to handle the plethora of responsibilities that arise in her work life. Along with

her pay evaluation role, Liz is the joint branch secretary of UNISON's Leeds local government branch, sits on the West Yorkshire pension fund advisory panel and works to avoid compulsory redundancies across Leeds council.

"I enjoy it because every day is different," said Liz. "This week I've dealt with bees and wasps nests and blocked drains in the UNISON building, helped people avoid losing their jobs and worked with local politicians on equal pay. I still have cases as well. It's a very varied job."

INSIGHT

The challenge of moving between environments and roles is something Liz is drawn to. Before she began working full time for UNISON in 2007, Liz was a performance and relationship officer for Leeds City Council.

To the layman the job sounds as if it's to do with acting or therapy, but Liz spent her time liaising between disparate council departments, council officers and councillors. Combined with 25 years of experience at the council – including a 'not very popular' first job as a poll tax administrator – the role has given Liz expert insight into the organisation's workings.

That insight is a real asset to Liz's role grading and evaluating pay at the council on behalf the union.

"It's a similar role to

my council job. It's about that relationship between council officers and politicians and trying to get the best outcomes in joint negotiations. I do have a good relationship with the council officers but sometimes it can get difficult when I go above their heads to the politicians," said Liz.

"For example, we became aware of children's centre staff who'd been underpaid for a number of years – some of them for more than a decade. They were working 39 weeks a year but only getting paid for 38. The council executive only wanted to go back two years. We argued over it for a while but in the end I went to the politicians and everyone got the money they were owed."

FUNDING

Maintaining a good working relationship with council officers is an essential part of Liz's job, so even in the face of strong feeling and disagreement, diplomacy is a must. She works closely with the council in avoiding compulsory redundancies, a difficult task considering that since 2010 grant funding has been cut by more than 45 per cent.

One of the achievements Liz is most proud of is helping adult social care staff who lost their jobs due to the cut backs. Part of her responsibilities was to locate people in other roles who wanted redundancy and to offer retraining through Union Learn to those care



I ENJOY IT
BECAUSE
EVERY
DAY IS
DIFFERENT





Photo: Andrew Paraskos

Champions

After nearly 10 years of government cuts all UNISON members know how hard it can be to provide good quality, effective public services. The Public Service Champions campaign aims to help win over public opinion to a change of direction on cuts and proper investment in public services. Public Service Champions seek to keep real people – service users and workers – at the heart of the campaign; telling their stories and showing the impact on people's lives. Throughout the campaign UNISON will use the real experience of members – experts you can trust when you don't believe politicians or the media

“THERE WAS SOME REALLY GOOD WORK BETWEEN THE UNION AND THE COUNCIL”

workers who wanted to move into the newly vacant positions.

Liz said: “We avoided making any compulsory redundancies. There was some really good work there between the union and the council.”

Liz’s motivation for working as a UNISON official is that she’s ‘not very good if there’s an injustice, I have to feel like I’m sorting it out’. However the onslaught of Tory cuts means that doing the right thing doesn’t always leave her feeling good.

“It’s about picking your battles. I find it difficult to communicate to our members that what we’ve managed to avoid up until now, is going to hit us,” said Liz.

“Leeds has probably been in a better position than other local authorities but I think that’s not going to be the same going forward. We’ve really got to get people onboard and organise in the workplace.”

Despite her evaluation of the situation, Liz is not downbeat. She ‘understands that as a collective we can achieve a lot’ and does her best to ensure that the day’s stresses don’t follow her home.

Although Liz is kept busy with her various extra-curricular roles, she and husband of 22 years, Mark, enjoy watching 20-year-old Sam play cricket and 19-year-old Alex play football at the weekend.

Liz is also a crown green bowling captain. It should come as no surprise that she set up the ten-woman team. ■

PRIDE OF THE LIONESSE

Former Doncaster Belle Jade Moore beat sexism and two holes in her heart to play football for England. **Mary Maguire** interviews a talented young footballer

As a little girl, Jade Moore was always 'messaging about kicking a football'. She was often seen on the touchline kicking a ball while her dad, himself a professional footballer, was training.

Today, Jade is an England international player – a Lioness; a rising star in women's football and champion of the sport. A midfielder who has played for Doncaster Belles, Leeds United, Birmingham City, Lincoln City, Notts County

“NOT SO MUCH A GENDER PAY GAP, BUT A CANYON”

and now Reading. And, no, her dad isn't called Bobby. But coming from a footballing family, she doesn't hide her passion for football:

“Football – it's my heaven. It's in my blood. I just love playing. When you score a goal, you feel an explosion of joy. A momentary burst of elation. It may last all of 10 seconds, but you remember it forever. It's like a drug.”

Jade counts among her successes playing in the England team in the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup in Canada where the team made it to the semi-finals and won bronze.

She was brought up in South Yorkshire went to Dinnington comprehensive, and later completed a degree in sports therapy at Leeds Metropolitan University.

She was encouraged by her dad Adrian, former Notts Forest, Chester and Worksop Town player. From the age of six when she was playing football with the boys, he could see she was talented. At 11 playing with girls' teams she was way above their level and at 14 he took her to Doncaster Belles. At 15, she made her debut for England under-17s. She was called to the seniors in October 2011 and got her first senior international cap in February 2012 when England won the Cyprus cup.

But it hasn't been easy for Jade or other women



to follow their chosen profession. Old-fashioned prejudices still exist, but are gradually lifting. They remain in the curious way that a lot of the professional teams are referred to as the 'Ladies'.

Chiefly, though, it's still viewed as a minor attraction. Women's football doesn't attract the huge crowds that bring money into the game. And big money follows the crowds providing the men's game with telephone number pay and transfer fees. The difference is not so much a gender pay gap, but a canyon. Jade says:

"As a professional footballer and an England international, I put my body through as much as the men daily, I train as hard as them and play as hard as them. But what men walk away with in a day is probably what a lot of us women walk away with in a year.

"I am sure if you take into account hours spent in training, some women players may not even be on the minimum wage. And some players are even put up in houses by their clubs.

"Football is a business. It's a money game. The men's game has gone from strength to strength and the money has followed it and got higher and higher. But it cannot be sustainable.

We don't want all our clubs at the bottom to fall by the wayside while the

“
SOME
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”

major clubs just get bigger."

Jade was recently at the rough end of the game when Notts County folded the women's team two days before the start of the Women's Super League season. Some players were left jobless and homeless. Jade says it was a '100 per cent blow', but she was one of the lucky ones. With the help of the players' union, the Professional Footballers' Association, and the FA, she secured a contract with Reading.

Jade reckons football probably saved her life. When she won a Football Association scholarship to Loughborough University, at the age of 16, a routine screen found she had two holes in her heart. It was a tough time for Jade and her family. And she has become an ambassador for the charity Cardiac Risk in the Young.

EXERCISE

She said:

"The holes in my heart would not have been discovered if it hadn't been for football. I had heart surgery just before my 17th birthday. It was the only time that I questioned my future in football. I felt what life would be like without the game. But, I was back training in two weeks and I'm as right as rain now."

It did put her life in perspective, however, and made her determined to get her degree. Plan B includes her own sports therapy business. And she's an advocate for the benefits of exercise. She said:

"It's so important to get

out and do something. When I was a kid, we were all playing out in the street, there's no-one out there now. These days so many kids sit at home on computers, rather than getting out and exercising and I am sure it will lead to long-term health damage."

Jade believes women's football will get ever more popular and recommends that girls with a passion for the game should be prepared for 'dedication, hard work and, above all, enjoyment'.

Catherine Stewart of the FA, said:

"The FA invests £18 million into the women's game every year which includes England teams, the FA WSL, SSE Women's FA Cup and grassroots football. In March we launched our new strategy Gameplan for Growth, committed to doubling female participation and attendances by 2020."

Right now Jade is training hard every day and looking forward to playing for England in the UEFA Women's Euro Championships, kicking off in Holland in July. Jade and the Lionesses play their first match on July 19 and you can follow their progress on Channel 4. ■

Euro2017- Group D

July 19 England v Scotland
July 23 England v Spain
July 27 England v Portugal
Quarter finals - July 30
Semi-finals - August 3
Finals - August 6
Televised on Channel 4





WE SHOWED THEM!

If the whole of the UK had followed this region's example, Labour would have formed the government, says **Paul Routledge**



UKIP IS FINISHED. EVEN NIGEL FARAGE GIVES IT ONLY TWO YEARS



THERE'S no stopping Jeremy Corbyn. His brilliant campaign robbed the Tories of their parliamentary majority, and now he's gearing up for government.

He confounded the pundits – including me – who said it couldn't be done, and put Labour in a position to reach for power in a second election that looks almost a racing certainty.

UNISON's role in that poll will be vital, and regional secretary John Cafferty says: "Corbyn's campaign was really fantastic. It clearly connected with young people and motivated them to vote Labour.

"When he got the media coverage and was able to speak directly to people, they clearly liked what they heard."

Corbyn's Labour struck a particular chord with public service workers and their families, he said. Policies on the NHS, social care, defence and security and Brexit resonated with UNISON members.

Now, at this time of heightened political opportunity, John Cafferty urged all Corbyn's detractors to get behind the leader and show a united Labour party.

"The campaigning must continue, to get the message out to the public and ensure when the next general election takes place – probably in a few months – that Labour secures a majority and can implement our manifesto promises."

CRACKPOTS

Theresa May's reckless gamble with the electorate produced a hung Parliament and a Tory minority government totally reliant on a minibus-load of Ulster hard-liners in the Democratic Unionist Party. As we went to press the Nasty Party were still trying to stitch together a deal with the Even Nastier Party,

The Tories are fighting like ferrets in a sack, and few believe her coalition of crackpots will last until next year – if that. Chief clown Boris Johnson is already plotting her downfall.

The scene now shifts to Westminster – and Brighton for Labour's conference in late September. Jeremy Corbyn's dazzling performance has closed down the long-running argument over his leadership. He is untouchable now.

Will some of Labour's big hitters from Yorkshire like Yvette Cooper swallow their pride and return to the Shadow Cabinet? Corbyn's front bench could do with some experienced parliamentarians better known to voters.

Mrs May's downfall started right here in Yorkshire with her manifesto launch in Halifax. She thought she was 'bloody difficult' until she came up 'ere and we showed her what bloody difficult really is.

If the rest of the country had followed the example of Yorkshire and Humberside, Jeremy Corbyn would be Prime Minister today.

Labour held on to all the 33 seats it won in the region in 2015, and gained four more – two from the Tories



Jeremy Corbyn



Melanie Onn



Tracey Brabin

and two from the Lib Dems.

Against all the odds, John Grogan took Keighley and Ilkley from the Tories' Kris Hopkins with a majority of only 249 votes, and former teacher Thelma Walker, ousted ex-TV presenter Jason McCartney in Colne Valley by 915 votes.

Nick Clegg, the former Lib-Dem leader and deputy prime minister in the 2010 Cameron coalition, lost Sheffield Hallam to disabled candidate Jared O'Mara, who suffers from cerebral palsy, and young Alex Sobel trounced motormouth Greg Mulholland in Leeds North West.

COLLAPSED

The Tories hung on at Ed Balls's old seat in Morley and Outwood, and Pudsey, but their much-vaunted 'big northern push' failed to dislodge former UNISON official Melanie Onn in Great Grimbsy, or the Kirklees trio - Paula Sherriff in Dewsbury, Holly Lynch in Halifax and ex-Corrie star Tracey Brabin in Batley and Spen.

The big metropolitan

centres - Leeds, Sheffield, Bradford, Barnsley, Rotherham, Hull, Doncaster and Wakefield - all remained in Labour hands. Naz Shah doubled her majority in Bradford West, as did Barry Sheerman in Huddersfield. And the Corbyn factor almost triumphed in Calder Valley.

No seats changed hands in Tory-dominated North Yorkshire, but Labour's Rachel Maskell doubled her vote in York Central. West and South Yorkshire remained true Red, and Corbyn will have a solid phalanx of 37 seats from the region at Westminster.

The Ukip vote, once touted as a winner, collapsed, many going to the Tories but a sizeable number coming back to Labour. Basically Ukip is finished. Even Farage gives it only two years.

Two issues will dominate the rest of this possibly short-lived Parliament: the future leadership of the Conservative Party and Brexit, with UK departure

from the European Union scheduled for March 29, 2019.

Mrs May wants to soldier on for a full five years at the head of a minority government, but senior Tories doubt that she can hang on for more than a few months. The stage is then set for a leadership contest - and another general election.

In the immortal words of voter Brenda from Bristol on learning of Mrs May's snap poll back in April: "Oh no, not another one!" If that's what it takes, Corbyn's view is: "Bring it on!"

Brexit negotiations, which are critical for workers' rights and the fate of millions of EU citizens living here, many working in the NHS and other public services, should be well under way by now. But confusion caused by the election result could delay or even derail talks with the European Commission and the 27 other EU countries.

June 2017 settled nothing finally, but it did transform the fortunes of Corbyn's Labour, and that's something to build on for the next big fight with the Tories. ■



SENIOR
TORIES
DOUBT
THAT SHE
CAN HANG
ON FOR
MORE
THAN
A FEW
MONTHS



UNINVITED GUEST

One of Michael Pogson's jobs is to be 'Mr Unpopular'.
Ryan Fletcher speaks to a UNISON activist and Labour
councillor who needs a sense of humour



Photo: Steve Morgan

Michael Pogson has the kind of no-nonsense approach to life that Yorkshire is famous for. Having grown up in the rural Holme Valley in West Yorkshire, the 47-year-old's appreciation of the outdoors reflects an unsentimental but humorous understanding of nature.

"I like fishing but spending two days in a tent by a pond to escape the wife is not my idea of fun," explained UNISON education officer Michael.

"I'd rather have a good walk upon the moors, fly fish some wild brown trout and then spend a few hours in the pub afterwards – that's what it's all about."

Wryness also helps in his job at Kirklees Council as a senior technical officer in environmental health. Part of the job requires Michael to interrupt parties late at night and ask the revellers to keep the noise down.

Being shouted and sworn at is par for the course when telling inebriated adults to button it in their own home, however that's not always the reaction he gets.

"I've gone to parties and told them to turn the noise down and been asked in for a drink or propositioned – it happens quite a lot. I politely decline and remind them



BEING
SHOUTED
AND
SWORN AT
IS PAR
FOR THE
COURSE



of the noise levels," said Michael.

As well as being good at handling people in an array of situations – from the funny to the hazardous – there's another key skill Michael possesses that allows him to carry out his role: He has a strong stomach.

Take, for instance, the time Michael was called to a sewage leak which involved 11 houses all connected to the same broken septic tank. Instead of being flushed into the sewage system, the waste water was overflowing into a nearby field.

Bad smells are something you have to get used to as an environmental health officer. "It's just one of those things, some people are cut out for it and some people aren't," he says. But the stink isn't why Michael remembers this particular job.

"The occupants of the houses were really panicking. They were on the verge of having to move out because they couldn't use their kitchens or bathrooms. All 11 households were looking at a bill of £15,000 each to connect them to the mains," Michael said.

"I helped them to organise and we got Yorkshire Water to come and do the work, so the bills got reduced from £15,000 to £500. It was the best feeling of job satisfaction I've ever had."

TRUANCY

Michael is used to doing important jobs that other people couldn't. Prior to

becoming an environmental health officer, he was a meat hygiene inspector at an abattoir.

It was while he was stationed at the abattoir that he first joined UNISON. A year later, in 1998, Michael joined his first picket line as part of a national strike over pay at the Food Standards Agency.

"I was on the local part of the News at 10 with my banner," he said.

The union reps at the time inspired Michael to 'put a little bit back' when he had the chance. Once his son, Thornley, turned 15 in 2014, Michael became a workplace rep.

His decision to become a lifelong learning rep and education officer at the Kirklees branch, however, stemmed from more personal reasons.

"I was officially expelled from school for truancy. I wasn't interested. They didn't like me and I didn't like them. I worked as a trainee butcher until I was 20 or 21 and then I decided to get some qualifications," said Michael.

He could see that small high street butchers were becoming a thing of the past and having moved to an in-store butchers at a supermarket, Michael realised he needed to

knuckle down if he wasn't to get trapped in a job he didn't like.

What started as gaining an English O level at night school, progressed to an HND in meat technology, meat inspection

qualifications and eventually an MSC in Environmental Health.

Michael said: "Adult education has been a real second chance for me and that's why I wanted to be an education officer. You can see people's confidence and self-belief increase just from going on one course and for some people that's enough. Others get a real appetite for learning and want to carry on. It's great to see people do that."

DETERMINED

Having seen the effects of seven years of Tory government Michael also decided to become a Holme Valley parish councillor for Labour. Part of the reason is that he believes the opportunities he benefited from are disappearing for younger generations.

"I had a second chance to go back into education, but it seems to me that's kind of died. I don't see my son, or other young people, having those types of opportunities at the minute. That's why I'm involved in politics," Michael explained.

Though it can feel like an upward slope when he sees the damage budget cuts are having at work and in his community, Michael is determined to keep going.

It's an attribute that will help him when he takes part in the Great North Run later this year. He's running to raise money for Hands Off HRI, which is a campaign to stop the proposed downgrading of Huddersfield Royal Infirmary.

To sponsor Michael contact UNISON's Kirklees local government office. ■



EAMON'S GHOSTS

Protestant terrorists killed Eamon Devlin's parents and critically injured his sister during the troubles in Northern Ireland. Now the UNISON member, a warehouse supervisor in Bradford, draws attention to mounting evidence of collusion between British forces, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and loyalist murderers. In an exclusive interview **Peter Carroll** hears how Eamon has coped with the tragedy and the authorities' failure to disclose vital documents

It was around 1 am on May 7, 1974 when Eamon Devlin and his two brothers were told by their uncle and aunt to wake up and get dressed.

While they were sleeping in their home in the countryside outside Dungannon, County Tyrone, Protestant terrorists had shot both of their parents dead, and pumped 12 bullets into their sister Patricia.

The murders happened in front of the family home.

That night, as usual, Gertrude Devlin had driven her Austin 1100 a couple of miles to nearby Coalisland to pick up her husband James from the family-owned bar he ran.

Gertrude's 17-year-old daughter Patricia went along to keep her company. They stopped to get fish and chips for James's supper.

When they reached the single-track lane connecting the roadway to their home, the Ulster Volunteer Force terrorists struck.

A man in combat gear stepped out of a hedge and raised his hand. He was carrying a long barrelled gun and Patricia thought he was a soldier.

But when he was two yards from the car he opened fire. Patricia heard her parents say they had been hit, her mother screaming 'I am dead'.

A second gunman then opened fire with a .445 handgun from inside a field of barley opposite the house.

Patricia had used her arms and legs to shield herself and played dead until the shooting stopped but her parents were beyond help, having been shot multiple times in the chest and

abdomen.

Eamon is now 55 and is a warehouse supervisor and UNISON member at Incommunities housing association in Bradford.

But the memories of that night, and the days and weeks that followed, are still vivid.

"I was woken up by Uncle Edward and Aunty Celia (along with brothers Colm and John) and told to get dressed.

"In the living room there were three men. One was Austen Curry, an elected member for the SDLP (Social and Democratic Labour Party) in the Northern Ireland Assembly and a family friend.

"We followed them down the drive to a car and there were lots of Royal Ulster Constabulary police outside.

"We drove to Aunt



I WAS
IN SHOCK.
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Photo: Robert Boardman

Sinead's house, daddy's older sister and the matriarch of the family.

"The house was full of people and that night they told us what had happened. Huge tears. Buckets of tears.

"The next day I was in shock. We didn't go to school and the next few days were a blur. Then we went to Uncle Edward and Aunt Theresa's house in Dungannon.

"She had a part-time cleaner and I remember one morning she said to us 'do you want tea in your sugar' instead of 'do you want sugar in your tea?'".

It was the first time the boys had smiled, let alone laughed, for days, but there was more trauma and heartache to come.

The funeral procession from the morgue to St Patrick's Church took place at night, and in the darkness

hundreds of devastated mourners and well-wishers lined the streets.

WOUNDS

The requiem mass next day was conducted by Cardinal Conway, Primate of all Ireland, in front of 2,000 mourners. Journalists and TV crews were everywhere.

Patricia watched the funeral cortege from her hospital bedroom window where she would spend the next two months, including her 18th birthday, recovering from her multiple bullet wounds.

Eamon said: "It was such a big deal, there were so many people there, so many priests there. I was bawling my eyes out. I just remember crying buckets."

More than 120 people were killed in the mid-1970s by the Protestant Loyalist

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Ulster Volunteer Force gang that operated in the rural Counties of Tyrone, Armagh and Dundalk.

The journalist and campaigner Anne Cadwallader (*please see panel on next page*) has conducted a long and thorough investigation into the events of the period when James and Gertrude Devlin were murdered.

And her book, 'Lethal Allies' investigates, in forensic detail, evidence that the illegal UVF organisation carried out their murders in collusion with agents of the British state.

Evidence of collusion between the army, the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Ulster Volunteer Force and the intelligence services is compelling.

Only one man has been convicted of the murder – he ►

was the driver of the killers' car – but the two gunmen have never been prosecuted.

Eamon and members of other similarly bereaved families are now fighting for the truth to be revealed about why their loved ones were murdered, and who knew they were going to be.

But the process is slow as the families' lawyers have to battle through meetings with the Police Ombudsman in Belfast to get to the documented facts.

"It's moving forward but every time you go to court there are failures to declare evidence from the authorities and we have to go back again", said Eamon.

"They are playing the long game, like they did with the Hillsborough inquiry, blaming lack of resources for not carrying out their statutory duties.

"They stall, stall, stall because people die off and that's one less person to worry about. But we will carry on. We don't want retribution, we just want to be told the truth about this."

Eamon and his siblings have all successfully held down good jobs and lived happy lives in the 43 years since they lost their parents.

Their lives and education were massively disrupted, but they fought through in spite of it.

Eamon decided he would do an Open University Degree in Social Sciences when he was in his forties "just to see if I could study at that level". He could, and, if he wants to, he can now put BSc after his name.

The old family home is now largely demolished but with the remaining stones, the community built a shrine to Our Lady in honour of James and Gertrude in the graveyard at St Malachy's church where they are buried.

FAMILY

There was a bit of youthful wildness when Eamon and his brothers and sister briefly moved in together in Coalisland in their teens.

Eamon took to the high life. He learned how to play snooker by playing all day in the club that former world champion Dennis Taylor started his career.

But it was a brief episode and hardly surprising when you consider he was essentially unsupervised.

For all the love and care given to the children by their extended family, Eamon says, it was not a normal life.

"You know, go to school, come home, get changed, eat, homework, play, bed.

"It was an absence of family life. You know, nobody to ask what sort of a day you had at school or if you needed any help. I had no-one to ask advice from and I became my own parent."

Eamon's childhood home was near an orchard, open

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fields and a beautiful lake. The family lived an idyllic country life.

Now he lives in Bradford but is a regular visitor, in rain or shine, to the reservoir Ogden Water just outside the city.

Eamon said: "It's different from East Tyrone but it does remind me of home. No traffic, sometimes no people, no atmospheric pollution.

"It's visual and sensory oxygen - the birds and just the beauty of it.

"There are benches with plaques to people who are dead but who found joy here. I like that their memory is still there."

So we took Eamon up to Ogden Water for photographs on a dull and cold Spring afternoon.

"I love it here," he said when we were leaving, and then smiled. "It brings back happy memories, I suppose that's it." ■

BattleForTruth

Anne Cadwallader's book 'Lethal Allies' which reveals compelling evidence of collusion between Protestant terrorists and the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment is published by Mercier Press. It can be ordered on-line or from bookshops. Proceeds will support the legal battle for the truth.



Photo: Robert Boardman



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SIMPLY THE BEST

When Ben Mayor started his career in social care, he decided there needed to be some changes.

Ryan Fletcher meets an award-winning union rep

It only takes a few minutes of speaking to Ben Mayor to realise why the TUC presented him with the 2017 regional award for young trade union representative of the year.

Most 25-year-olds at the outset of their career do their best to keep their heads down and fit into the culture of their workplace, but the same can't be said for Ben.

When he began work in an assisted living facility in Leeds run by a not-for-profit social care organisation, Ben decided there needed to be some changes.

In 2015 there were only a handful of union members among the social care provider's 200 Leeds-based staff. Thanks to Ben's efforts over the last couple of years, half the organisation's Leeds employees are now UNISON members.

"I got a job as a senior support worker and I started recruiting people under the radar while I was a UNISON youth officer. I was speaking to people about joining the union in my own time and outside work. It's considered a union workplace now and it's got to the point where new staff, and even new managers, are advised to join within a couple of days of arriving by the

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support staff,” explained Ben.

“It's fantastic. There's such a difference between the culture in the workplace that existed when I first started and what it is now. It's almost like it's a different company. They've realised that people are getting representation and are prepared to challenge bad practices and stand up for themselves. It's changed their approach to staff for the better.”

As well as being promoted to team leader, Ben also became a workplace rep. Despite the company still not officially recognising the union, he has helped secure a number of victories for staff. These include a small incremental hourly pay rise as well as an increase from £24 to £64 for sleeping shift payments, which was part of a national UNISON campaign but was adopted by the company after the staff threatened to take collective cases forward.

Ben's description of the negative elements of social care is depressingly familiar: Low paid and overworked staff doing their best to provide essential but underfunded services for vulnerable people. At one facility inadequate staffing levels had culminated in

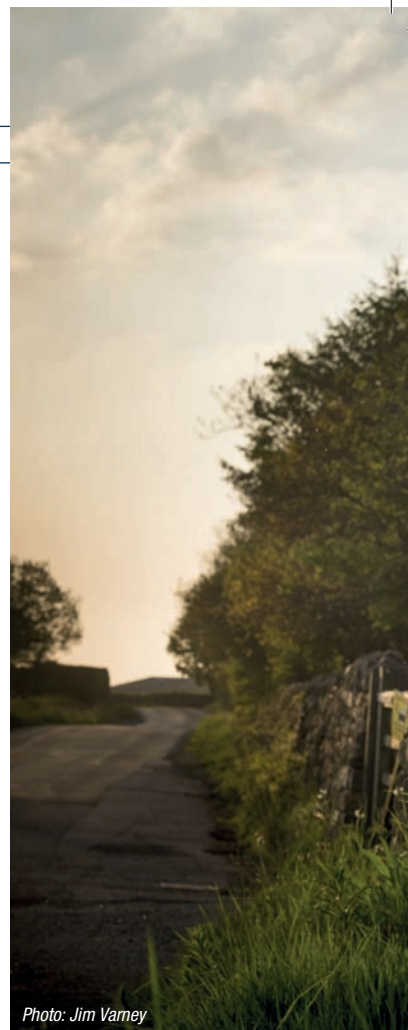


Photo: Jim Varney

a series of increasingly dangerous incidents for support workers. The issue had been raised before by individual members of staff but no action was taken to resolve it.

“People in that building joined the union and I supported them with the grievance. We didn't even have to put it in, I just made management aware that we were going to and all of a sudden the staffing ratios changed so that the staff felt safe,” said Ben.

“These kind of things have an effect on people. They see that the union is relevant and that we can win things if we work together.”

Working for the good of others was an idea that Ben came into contact with from an early age. Growing up



in Tadcaster, Ben saw his mum, Susan, go out to work everyday as a nurse. As a teenager his ambition was to serve his country by joining the army.

BENEFIT

All that changed with the invasion of Iraq in 2003. It was at that point that he began to question things he'd previously taken at face value.

He said: "My family weren't trade unionists. What first set me on that path was the Iraq war. I didn't do well in school so I thought I'd join the army so I could do a bit of good. But after the invasion I thought, if they can lie about going to war, what else are they lying about?"

After school Ben spent a few years working in

factories and as a tree surgeon. With his new critical perspective, he saw that these occupations would benefit from strong trade unions – a realisation that would make a lasting impression.

Eventually Ben decided to continue following his ambition to help others and returned to education to complete a degree at York College in public services management. He had aimed to become a youth worker, but Tory cuts made positions in that area all but impossible to find. Instead he went on to do a social work post-graduate degree at Leeds Beckett University, where he first became a UNISON activist.

Ben enjoys his current job because it combines working closely with service users with managerial

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responsibilities. When he's not working or on union business, Ben can be found building dry stone walls.

"It's an activity that uses both the left and right hand side of the brain, so it's incredibly logical but you've also got to be creative as well. But I struggle for time at the moment because I'm either representing members or out unionising other workplaces," said Ben.

"Historically there's been such a low level of trade union membership in the private sector of social care. I see myself playing a role in changing that. It doesn't matter how many companies there are, if you've got union membership across the board you can drive everything up – not just for staff but for vulnerable people as well." ■

'RED TAPE' KEEPS US SAFE



The Conservatives are being handed a golden opportunity to downgrade health and safety as we exit the European Union. Only trade unions like UNISON can ensure it is kept at the top of the agenda. **Tom Jones**, head of policy at Thompsons Solicitors, warns of a serious battle ahead to keep vitally important standards



HEALTH
AND
SAFETY
LAWS
HAVE
HELPED
KEEP
PEOPLE
ALIVE



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

Members will be all too aware that sloppy health and safety in the workplace can have devastating consequences.

Since we were founded in 1921, Thompsons has taken a central role in fighting alongside trade unions to protect and improve workplace safety standards

and employment rights.

From winning the first industrial disease case in the UK in 1956, the first case in the House of Lords for asbestos-related disease in 1972 and helping to establish the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, our work with unions has helped to enshrine essential protection into UK law.

Society, and workplace health and safety, have come a long way over the years, but, while people are still being injured at work and dying at work every year, our campaigning continues.

Critics - usually big business fat cats, the right wing press, Conservative ministers, and believers in a shrunk state and totally free markets - dismiss the protection achieved by the trade unions as 'red tape'.

But so-called 'red tape' has helped make our workplaces safer, reducing the number of needless fatalities and other accidents at work and the risk of work-related disease.

Health and safety laws have helped keep people alive, when fifty years ago they were at risk of serious injury or death at work.



However, there is still work to be done to make sure employers protect the health and safety of their workers.

Just this year, we worked with UNISON to investigate a case for a member who was working at a school in Guiseley, near Leeds, when he broke his arm in a fall.

SKYLIGHT

The surveyor was assessing building repairs and walking along the roof of the school when he lost his footing and fell through a skylight. His employer had failed to inform him of the law that states that no one should walk within two metres of a skylight, yet the skylights on the roof were only half a metre apart which meant he didn't have any choice.

An employer who took their health and safety

responsibilities seriously would have ensured their employees were properly trained on basic safety protocols and this accident would have been avoided.

At a time of huge political and social change, it would be naïve to assume that the safety protection available to

workers today will be there tomorrow. Tory ministers over the years have always made life easier for bosses and harder for workers. Brexit only adds another layer of uncertainty.

REPEAL

The Conservatives are being handed a golden opportunity to downgrade health and safety as we exit the EU. The 'Great Repeal Bill' would transfer all the rights that exist now, but also give the power to a Conservative government to unpick anything they don't like, regulation by regulation.

There is a serious battle to be had to protect the basic building blocks that ensure a safe place of work.

People continue to be seriously injured as a result of workplace accidents, sometimes fatally. Far too many are dying from industrial diseases which are yet to reach their peak, such as mesothelioma. It is the union movement that will ensure a worker's right to a safe and healthy working environment is kept at the top of the agenda. ■



**TORY
MINISTERS
HAVE
ALWAYS
MADE
LIFE
EASIER
FOR
BOSSSES
AND
HARDER
FOR
WORKERS**



Tom Jones

Take-a-pic

Thompsons has launched a campaign in the form of a photography exhibition to draw attention to the importance of health and safety.

The competition, open to all, will show the human side of why health and safety is so important in the workplace; why the legislation is there to uphold safety and should never be considered a burden or a chore, but as an essential protection for all - one that is needed today as it has ever been.

Open now and running until June 28, your photographs will be seen by a panel of independent judges with the winners displayed at an exhibition in the People's History Museum in Manchester. There is also a share of £5,000 in prizes.

Simply go to www.thompsons.law/focus to take part. Spread the word to all your friends, families and colleagues. Get involved to support the campaign to help maintain a focus on safety at work.





WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Turkish speaker Becky Woodhouse's career helping young children has taken her from Barnsley to Cyprus and back again. **Christine Buckley** reports

Learning is a way of life for UNISON member Becky Woodhouse.

As an early years practitioner and cover supervisor at a Barnsley primary school, she is pivotal in helping young children at the start of their learning journey. And through her union, she has embarked on her own adult learning journey to upgrade her skills and open up fresh opportunities.

Becky, 32, has worked with young children all her

career and her experience includes working abroad.

She began her working life as a nursery nurse at a private nursery in Barnsley. But after a couple of years, Becky wanted a little more adventure in her life so she decided to spend some time overseas. First she went to the southern half of Cyprus for a summer, returning to the UK for the winter. Then she went back to the island the following summer, but this time to the Turkish northern half. Finally she decided to stay in Cyprus,

acquiring an excellent command of Turkish along the way.

On the island she worked as a nursery teacher and then a Key Stage 1 co-ordinator. After that, and with her language improving all the time to the level that she could give professional talks in Turkish, she went to work at a Turkish prep school that was introducing English style schooling. But it wasn't long before a high-ranking English school approached her and she went to work there.

Becky worked in Cyprus for eight years. But, while it was a tremendous experience, she missed her family and friends and so decided to move back to her Yorkshire home.

Despite the big task of trying to get a new job in one country while working in another one, Becky's return was swift. She returned home on a Saturday in July, had an interview at her present school – Dodworth St John the Baptist CoE primary academy – on the Monday and started in the new academic year in September. At the school Becky works as an early years practitioner and cover supervisor, helping a teacher in the classroom.

And it was at this school that she was introduced to UNISON and the idea of unions at work. In a move that would be highly unusual in the private sector, the school suggested that she might want to join a union. "It was all new to me," she says, but she joined, started

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receiving the magazines and then came across some of the many workshops that UNISON runs.

CHALLENGES

Just as the little ones in her care are acquiring new skills all the time, Becky believes that it's important to keep upskilling even if you are experienced at your job. She thinks it's vital to develop and seek fresh challenges. Since moving back to the UK she's completed key skills level 1 and 2 in maths and level 2 in English at work.

Through UNISON and her Barnsley branch, Becky was attracted by the Your Skills Your Future workshop. The course aims to hone existing, transferable and potential skills for professional and personal development. It is designed to make students feel more confident about their skills and abilities. Becky chose the course mainly because it was held on a Saturday so she didn't have to miss work. The day-long session was led by Rose Bent, UNISON's regional learning and development officer for Yorkshire and Humberside. And on the course Becky met Gillian Nixon, an archivist at Barnsley museum, who has now started working for the union two days a week.

The course lived up to Becky's expectations. Along with focusing on building key skills, importantly it also pointed out the skills that people already have which they may overlook or not count as work skills.

There was a wide range of participants on the course with IT workers, nurses and

“I WANT
TO GET
MY TEETH
STUCK
INTO
SOMETHING
ELSE”



Photo: Mark Harvey

many others taking part.

An added bonus was the three women got on extremely well and now hold monthly meetings to share ideas on working, read short skills books and chat. They are trying to bring in others to their ad hoc get-togethers.

Now Becky, engaged to be married in September, has been bitten by the skills bug and is looking at ways to move into other work alongside her core teaching role. A keen yoga practitioner, she's interested in becoming a yoga instructor in the evenings and weekends. "I want to broaden my horizons and look at more adult learning courses."

Next on her list of UNISON courses are Pathways into UNISON; Women's Assertiveness; and

Building Confidence in Women. She's also hoping that the union will bring its Return to Learn course to Barnsley, a course that imparts a comprehensive skillset of writing, researching, interviewing and IT.

She says that the large range of courses available through UNISON impresses her and that this has given her a very positive impression of the union. "It's all been very positive and I'm looking into a lot of different things. It has opened a huge window of opportunity for me."

"I'm happy in my job but I'm looking at different ways of improving myself. I want to get my teeth stuck into something else and see where it takes me." ■



STIR THINGS UP!

UNISON's former head of press and broadcasting **Mary Maguire** explains how ordinary trade union members become extraordinary trade union activists

I was one before I knew it. One day I was shouting at the television. The next, I was on a march. I was a typical union member – join up, go to the meetings (sometimes), but don't get involved.

It was July 1972 – my dad, a postie, had been on strike earlier in the year. A union march was processing below our office windows in Charterhouse Street, near Fleet Street in London. Dockers and their vocal supporters were marching to Pentonville Prison to demand the release of the Pentonville 5. In nearby offices, people were leaning out of windows shouting: "go back to work".

Our office manager, Percy, was doing the same. That made me mad.

I picked up my handbag, put on my lipstick, put the cover on my Adler (just google it) and joined the march. Don't get me wrong – this was not bravado – it was just about lunch-time, so I took my hour on the march and then went back to work. I was fuming and didn't want to speak to anyone in my office.

PROTESTED

But, I had become an activist. I realised later that I had always been one. At school, I was the one who protested on behalf of the class if we

“
WE NEED
EVERY
ACTIVIST
WE
CAN GET
”



Mary Maguire

thought there was something unfair. And I did rant at the TV and the newspapers an awful lot.

Activists come in all shapes and sizes, and have all manner of causes. Equal rights, the environment, save the whale, ban the bomb, animal rights, human rights, women's rights, lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual rights, disabled rights, cyclists' rights, and the right to wear a plastic red nose and beer bottom spectacles every third Wednesday of the month.

They are rebels. With causes. And they have one thing in common. A desire to right a wrong, to challenge the established order, to

change things (hopefully) for the better.

Down the years, progressive politics have been championed by activists. Most of us have seen of or heard of the film Spartacus – the Roman slave, who led a rebellion – giving rise to many ‘I am Spartacus’ moments.

More recently in 2012 schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai was shot by a Taliban gunman in Pakistan for defying the ban that girls be educated. She survived and later received the Nobel Peace Prize.

Malala joins champions such as Rosa Parks, who in 1955, refused to give up her seat to a white passenger, resisting bus segregation in Montgomery Alabama, US. Her act of defiance became a symbol of resistance to racial segregation. Or anti-apartheid hero and UNISON honorary president, Nelson Mandela. Or suffragettes such as Emily Wilding Davison who died fighting for the rights of

women to vote.

Celebrities who espouse a cause are sometimes referred to as activists. Posh Joanna Lumley, who stuck up for the Gurkhas. Or the Hollywood stars who give publicity to their cause at red carpet awards. And others, such as Angelina Jolie – described as a human rights activist - became a special UN ambassador.

I don’t pretend to be in that league, but I’m proud to be part of the greatest and best group of activists – the trade union activist. Our movement is one big army of activists. And we need every activist we can get.

How do they get there? Like me, some get mad, some fall into it by mistake, some have role models at home or at work, some just can’t say no, for others it happens at that ‘last straw’ moment. An injustice, an unfairness, an inequality.

INSPIRATION

Active magazine time and again describes how people are transformed - a member one minute, an activist the next. Many activists I speak to tell of that “final straw” moment that pushed them full pelt to getting stuck in.

For example, regional convenor and former UNISON president Wendy Nichols had a great role model in her mother who was an “inspiration as a trade unionist and as a woman”. But it was inequality that really got up her nose.

Or there’s Mobina

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DON’T
JUST
SIT
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RANTING
AT THE
TELLY
”

Begum who works at Leeds Beckett university who was moved by the suffering of women fleeing domestic violence, the desperate plight of the homeless and of refugees and asylum seekers. Now a UNISON activist.

Sharon Simcox, now Rotherham branch convenor, became one after she was suspended from her job, without cause. During the seven weeks she was suspended, her anger gradually found a focus and she became a UNISON steward. Donna Padgett, Leeds branch, became one after suffering from a bullying manager.

Activists bring our union to life. Remember the late Dave Ellis – dubbed Mr UNISON – Huddersfield chief steward, who, during a re-grading strike, famously refused to leave the picket line and ate his Christmas dinner outside the building. And, of course, the Kinsley cleaners – three brave women who took a stand against pay cuts. There are literally thousands of others who won’t be pushed around.

When push comes to shove, there’s an activist in all of us trade unionists. If you want to be more involved, don’t wait for that final straw moment. UNISON gives stacks of help and advice to do so. Whatever floats your boat, don’t just sit there ranting at the telly – get out there and stir things up. ■



Wendy Nichols: Her mother inspired her

A REAL STAR TURN

Single mum Magda Lezama is a senior Leeds council engineer, a rambler, a wine enthusiast and a UNISON activist. **Annie Mitchell** managed to catch up with her

After only a few minutes talking with Magda Lezama, I start to imagine that her life story would make a great film. Even in 2017, engineering is a profession that struggles to attract enough women, but at 60-years-old, Magda bucked that trend way back in the '80s. Not only that, she gained her first engineering degree from the University of the West Indies – cue some lovely location shots – beaches, palm trees, blue sea. Born and raised in Trinidad and Tobago – one of nine children – how she came to work for Leeds City Council seems like a tale of complete chance, but also of opportunity grabbed with both hands.

“In 1989 I came on holiday to visit my brother in London and while I was there applied for a job at Leeds City Council. I wanted to be a chartered engineer and to become a member of the Institute of Civil Engineers you needed to work with a recognised employer and Leeds Council was. I was with my son Rhett who was one at the time – it was a brave move, especially as I had never been to Leeds and didn't even know where it was, but sometimes ignorance is bliss. I got the job.”

After sorting out work permits and visas Magda headed to Leeds on the train:

“I arrived with my suitcase – which I left at the station – to start work in April 1990. Someone in human

resources knew someone who was moving to a job in London and arranged for me to get her place on the day I started work – I was lucky.

“To become a member of the Institute of Civil Engineers you have to work in different aspects of engineering – highways, road design etc. but I eventually settled in drainage. While I was working I got my master’s degree from Sheffield Hallam and have been a senior engineer at Leeds City Council for 26 years – for the past 24 working in flood risk management in the highways department.”

TOUGH

Magda took the challenges of moving and of her choice of career in her stride. Working on site is ‘tough’ she says, but you get a strong impression that she can give as good as she gets:

“There are quite a few women engineers now, but years ago I was the only one. It’s a tough world but whether it’s by luck or good fortune I have always been well supported even on site. When they see that you know what you are doing the guys show you some respect.”

At Leeds City Council it didn’t take long for Magda to find out about the union:

“On day one the NALGO union rep signed me up. The rep always encouraged me when he passed by and I used to hand out leaflets and go on marches. I then went on a women’s course where I met lots of other women who were speaking

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out and that’s why I got more involved. After a few years the rep pushed me to become a steward and I became part of the black members group – we didn’t meet very often to start, but slowly and with a very supportive branch we grew.”

In 2016 Magda became chair of UNISON’s regional black members group. Her mission, she explains, is to get more black members involved at branch level to make their opinions known and be heard by the union:

“I want to encourage all UNISON branches to have a black members group that can act as a springboard to get people involved into mainstream union activities. A starting point, so black members feel comfortable and nurtured and encouraged – a union for all of us – to be able to raise and deal with matters throughout the different layers and structures of the union.”

Magda’s enthusiasm and commitment to UNISON and engineering is clear and as a single woman, she also relishes an active social life – cue more great location shots.

“I have been in a wine group for many years that travels around Europe visiting wineries. I also enjoy living in the centre of Leeds and I’m part of a walking group. Yorkshire is such a lovely part of the country to explore.”

Magda’s son Rhett has clearly inherited his mother’s drive:

“Rhett has a first class honours degree from Hull University in computer

games design. He works in London now as a games designer and I am very proud of him.”

Looking to the future Magda says:

“I want to go back to the Caribbean at some point. But I want to make sure that I know as much as I can professionally. There are always new things coming up and I want to stay as up to date in my profession as possible. I am at a time in my life where I enjoy a good work/life balance. I still have real enthusiasm to enjoy the job and the people I work with.”

Magda has kept up her professional membership in the Caribbean and last year after a rigorous interview and testing, she was made a Fellow of the Association of Professional Engineers of Trinidad and Tobago.

“I went home to get the award and my brother and family all came to the ceremony – it was a proud moment.”

Cue the credits – all of them to Magda Lezama. ■

WhoWeAre

Black members have many of the same concerns as other members about access to employment, pay, promotion and training. However, racial discrimination can deepen the impact of problems faced in the workplace.

UNISON’s Black members’ group (known as a self-organised group) campaigns for equality in the workplace and the wider community.

LEST WE FORGET



Unless we remember man-made calamities – whether wars, pit disasters or catastrophic fires – we are doomed to repeat them, says **Peter Carroll**



BODIES
OF
FATHERS
WERE
FOUND IN
THE PIT
WITH
THEIR
ARMS
AROUND
SONS



Every November we are urged to commemorate those who died in the last century's two world wars: 'Lest we forget' is the rallying cry.

But what would go wrong if we all decided to forget, and dispensed with cenotaphs and sombre wreath-laying by politicians displaying their sadness for the television cameras?

To younger people, such state rituals are at best boring and at worst a self-righteous display of the power of the political and military elites.

For many young people, who know of those bloody

conflagrations only through black and white images in TV documentaries, it seems like ancient history.

But 'Lest we forget' is a direct appeal to reason. It means that if we don't commemorate the human suffering caused by war, we are doomed to repeat the same mistakes again.

For the same reason, UNISON and fellow trade unions unveiled a statue in Barnsley to commemorate the 383 who died in England's worst mining disaster 150 years ago. Some of the dead were as young as 12.

The appalling tragedy happened in 1866 at the

Oaks Colliery at Hoyle Mill, Barnsley, when two underground explosions devastated the mine.

The whole world was shocked by the scale of the disaster – just as it was by the scores who died in the horrific Grenfell Tower fire.

Records of the day suggest that 400 miners were working below ground on the day of the first explosion on December 12.

A second explosion killed 27 volunteer rescuers, and research into burial records suggests that 169 bodies were never recovered and remain in the old colliery workings to this day.

The bodies of fathers were found in the pit with their arms around sons and pony-keepers with their arms around their ponies.

Workers had travelled the length and breadth of the country to find work in Barnsley. The dangers of working underground were huge, but when you are starving the risk seems worth it.

IMPORTANT

But what relevance has this terrible event in the modern world? Why build memorials to those who died so long ago and who no-one alive today ever met?

UNISON regional organiser Robin Symonds, who was at the unveiling ceremony, is in no doubt about why it is vitally important that we remember.

Robin said: "This disaster happened 150 years ago but little has changed.

"383 men and boys were killed at work and people are still being killed at work every day because their employers are interested only in the pursuit of profit.

"The problem hasn't gone away. We have health and safety legislation that we have fought tirelessly to establish, but even with all that we still see tragedies in the workplace. And we know there are people who want to destroy those legal protections and who want to take us back to 1866.

"But by commemorating this tragedy we are sending out

a clear message to politicians who want to trash health and safety legislation – we're not having it. Never again."

All the Brexit rhetoric about making a 'bonfire of EU red-tape' is designed to mislead voters into thinking they want to destroy needless and costly bureaucracy, to free up scarce resources and allow private enterprise to forge ahead.

But what they really mean is that they want to remove obligations on employers to safeguard their workers from harm or injury at work.

They believe health and safety is a costly burden on capital. For years, right-wing think tanks and government advisors have drip-fed their equally right-wing allies in the media with corrosive lies about this issue.

It's 'Elf 'n Safety gone mad, rave the media mouthpieces in response to a bogus story that someone was forced needlessly to wear a hard-hat, or a high-visibility jacket.

All of this cunning propaganda is funded by wealthy financiers who of course have a vested interest in slashing protections for workers to drive up profits.

It is all part of the Tories' ongoing attack on working people.

SHAMEFUL

Not only have we been blamed for a financial crisis caused by the astonishing greed of the bankers, we are now threatened

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with losing basic health and safety protections in the workplace.

Every state function to protect us is being dismantled. Teachers, environmental health officers, police officers, health professionals, social workers and community carers have all been routed by the Government's austerity programme.

And it's no accident. This is an ideologically motivated attack on the very principle of the state and its duty to protect its citizens.

They have set out to transfer power and money away from the majority of people and concentrate it in the hands of a tiny but unimaginably wealthy elite.

It is a monstrously cruel project and its victims are growing by the day.

Dying people having their benefits cut because they are deemed to be fit enough to work; disabled people having their benefits cut and committing suicide as a consequence; desperate families having to rely on the local food bank just to survive. It is a disgraceful, shameful and sadistic attack on ordinary working people.

That's why we must always remind ourselves and others of what happens when the heartless and rapacious neo-liberal machine is allowed to do as it pleases with our lives.

So we will keep all these memories alive - lest we forget that human beings are still being exploited and endangered, just as they were 150 years ago. ■



Peter Carroll





PAUL ROUTLEDGE

Mirror political columnist

They can't take it away from us

Even Lancastrian actor George Costigan says it: Yorkshire is unique. But it's not just the scenery, it's the people. He mentions the warmth, the humour, the straight-talking; but he fails to mention the workplace comradeship. That's what really sets us apart and you won't read about that in the Tory Yorkshire post

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YORKSHIRE
DOESN'T
NEED
SELLING.
IT ONLY
NEEDS
VISITING
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ACTOR
GEORGE
COSTIGAN

IT'S summer in God's Own County, and no matter how bad the political news, this is still the best part of England to live and work in.

We're blessed with wonderful countryside, superb cities, lovely market towns and villages – and above all, great people.

I was going to start this article with a fine old rant about Mark Carney and the Bank of England's pessimistic predictions for the rest of this year.

And we'll come to him later, promise.

But then I chanced on an interview with actor George Costigan, who played sex-mad businessman Bob in the hit film 'Rita, Sue and Bob Too', filmed in the rough end of Bradford.

He's also been in Emmerdale, and he says: "Yorkshire doesn't need selling. It only needs visiting. It'll do fine all by itself. What makes this place unique is the warmth of the people."

"Yorkshire people look you in the eye, talk to you, tell it straight, have a sense of humour and those qualities, above all the beauty, the seriousness about food and dogs, means the journey back to Yorkshire is always a warm one.

"Yorkshire people seem to think – like the French – that everything necessary to life is contained within their borders. Living here, it's easy to see why."

Fine words, from a Salford-raised Lanky, but maybe because he's an actor, an individualist, George fails to mention the workplace comradeship. I recall not just the Miners' Strike for Jobs more than

thirty years ago, but the care workers' dispute in Doncaster, the 11-week binmen's strike in Leeds, the Superdrug action in South Elmsall, and the weeks of walkout by junior doctors and other NHS staff in their battles down the years to sustain decent terms and conditions.

You won't read about that in the Tory Yorkshire Post that carried George's interview. But you will read about it here. That's the function of trade union communication, member to member, activist to activist, rep to rep. And I'm proud to be part of it. Whoever runs the country, they can't take away the union, or our great county.

ROS ROMPS HOME

Doncaster's Labour mayor Ros Jones has been re-elected with a whopping 50 per cent-plus of the vote.

What better way to celebrate than a great day out at the UNISON Races, Donny's top summer attraction, on August 5.

And beat post-election blues with a flutter on the gee-gees. The union can't guarantee sunshine – though we generally get it.

BLUE IS MY VALLEY

Happy Valley, the gritty crime series set in Calderdale, won double Baftas for best drama and best actress, Sarah Lancashire.

It ought to have a special award for irony, as well. Not much happiness in this show.

MAY NOT REPLY

Now about that Mark Carney, the Bank of England governor. He says families face squeezed living standards 'as wages stagnate' this year.

That makes it sound like some kind of





natural event, like floods. Nonsense! Low pay, wage curbs, agency work, zero hours contracts, bogus self-employment and redundancies are all deliberate acts of policy.

There's nothing natural or inevitable about such events. They are the work of employers, and in the public sector, politicians.

Canadian-import Carney warns that wages won't keep up with prices for the goods and service we consume. He means the Government will continue to clamp down on pay for the seventh year running.

This policy is worst in the NHS, where the one per cent pay cap is forcing staff out of the service. In a pre-election letter to the Prime Minister, Britain's nurses warned: "Your cap on our pay means at least £3,000 less in our pockets each year.

"Years of real-term pay cuts have left nurses heading for the door, with some going to stack shelves in the supermarket instead. How is it that in 21st-century Britain, some are forced to turn to food banks or ask for hardship grants just to make ends meet?

"It's little wonder there are now 24,000 unfilled nursing jobs in the NHS in England."

Did they get a reply from the banker-turned-premier? Of course not.

COSTA PLENTY

Thousands of Yorkshire school students look forward to university in the autumn. But is it worthwhile getting into £40,000 debt for a degree?

Research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests it may not be money well spent – because the jobs aren't there.

There isn't enough skilled employment



for the rapidly-expanding graduate population, so a rising number end up in work where their degree is worthless.

Today, 35 per cent of workers have a degree, compared with 25 per cent in 2008. As a result, the proportion in low-skilled jobs has risen from 5.3 per cent to 8.3 per cent in that period.

The young man or woman serving your Costa coffee in the high street chain might have a degree in art history, or literature – not 'barista' studies.

This unjust state of affairs is the natural result of New Labour setting an over-ambitious target of 50 per cent of young people going to university, compounded by Tory strategy of turning higher education into a profit-making business.

Cynical university bosses will take as many students as can pay the tuition fees, just hiked up to £9,500 a year. They don't care if their graduates get the right job, as long as they get their money.

But a degree is no longer a guarantee of a career involving your chosen subject, or a skilled job. And round the neck of young graduates is the albatross of tuition and maintenance loans, on which the Tories are doubling interest rates.

I'm not saying 'don't go to uni', but I do say 'do the maths, go with your eyes wide open, and when you start work remember who saddled you with this chronic financial liability'.

HUNT FOR JEREMY

Cyber criminals found it easy to attack the NHS because too much hospital IT equipment is out of date and insufficiently protected.

That, in turn, was largely due to the squeeze on capital spending imposed by Jeremy Hunt, the worst Health Secretary since the service was founded.

No wonder they kept him off the airwaves for the duration of the crisis. ■

Self-serving

Don't know about you, but self-service checkouts at the supermarket drive me mad with frustration.

I can never work out the right sequence, while exasperated shoppers queue up behind me, rolling their eyes at my senile incompetence.

And they're often older than me.

M&S, Tesco and Sainsbury's, plus W H Smith, are all going over to self-checkout, claiming it's for the convenience of customers.

Not true. It's to save money on shopworkers. Once installed, computer tills don't need wages. They don't get sick, or go on holiday, or have babies, or expect pensions.

But they don't buy carrots, or beer, or bread, either. Ever thought of that, greedy supermarket gaffers? Just wait till they find a robot that can do your job!



The views expressed in this column are not necessarily those of UNISON



Members should take special precautions with a potentially hazardous disinfectant which is in use across the NHS, says **Amanda Dixon** of Thompsons Solicitors

UNISON members working for the NHS across Yorkshire and Humberside are being warned about a potentially hazardous disinfectant in use across the region.

The chemical Actichlor can give off toxic fumes when mixed with hot water and can cause lasting damage to the respiratory system.

The warning emerged after 22 UNISON members were awarded £70,000 in damages after the union took their case to court.

The members weren't given any training on how to use the chemical correctly or the dangers it could pose. The safety goggles they were given were ineffective. When managers ignored their concerns, the cleaners contacted UNISON and Thompsons were instructed to investigate.

Our inquiry found that mixing Actichlor with hot water in small, enclosed rooms resulted in the cleaners breathing in hazardous fumes. A lack of adequate training meant that the workers didn't know they should have been mixing the disinfectant with cold water or that it needed to be mixed in large, ventilated spaces.

The court awarded the damages because the hospital had provided sub-standard

equipment and failed to comply with the relevant safety regulations. The 22 cleaning staff – who all work for the Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust – began using Actichlor seven years ago, but weren't given any training in its use.

While this case related to just one hospital, it is important for members to be aware of the hazardous nature of the disinfectant, which is being used by the NHS across the region and indeed across the UK.

CONTACT

If you have to use Actichlor in your work and have been unwell, with symptoms such as runny eyes, nose sores or wheezing coughs, you should contact your union rep immediately.

It is worth pointing out that UNISON members, and their families, using the legal service provided by the union, keep 100 per cent of their compensation, whatever the injury and however complex the claim.

They can rest assured that they will get the maximum compensation because Thompsons' lawyers have been experts in their field for years. Members also benefit from peace of mind, knowing that their case is being handled by a legal partner to the trade union movement.

Those who needed

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THE
MASKS
THEY'D
BEEN
GIVEN
WERE
USELESS
”

to use the union's legal scheme after injury or following a problem at work, including on criminal matters, have backed it with overwhelmingly positive feedback.

During 2016, Thompsons Solicitors, through UNISON, provided expert legal advice and representation to hundreds of members and helped secure tens of millions of pounds in compensation.

Every member who was represented in an employment or criminal law case gave positive feedback for the support they received. There was similarly high praise from members who had been injured and needed to use UNISON's legal service to ensure they got proper legal advice and the maximum compensation. Thompsons has specialist legal teams primed to fight for UNISON members across the UK, including in Leeds and Sheffield.

Overall, in 2016, 96 per cent of members in Yorkshire and the Humberside were happy with the service they received and would recommend the union's lawyers to others. ■



Amanda Dixon
of Thompsons
Solicitors

● For more information about the UNISON legal service visit www.thompsonstradeunion.law/trade-unions/unison or call 0800 0 857 857.

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UNISON Living

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