

ACTIVE!

YOUR ESSENTIAL PPE CHECKLIST

FACE MASK



GLOVES



EYE SHIELD



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MEMBERSHIP**



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Your legal rights



there for you

supporting UNISON members
when life gets tough

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

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

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UNISON
the public service union

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IT'S BEEN A PRIVILEGE

I've been so proud to serve as UNISON general secretary for 20 years. It has been the honour and privilege of my life to be able to represent our incredible members from across our four nations, and never more so than during the pandemic.

UNISON members have helped save lives and protect our communities. You have been, once again, the foundation on which our society rests.

I can think of no tougher time for members, but also no time in which your incredible skill, dedication and care has been so clearly demonstrated.

This will be my last column for this magazine, as I retire on December 31. Every day for the past 47 years, I have been driven by a belief in fairness and

justice for all our members. In the past five months I have seen our members, our staff, our public services and our union at their very best.

New members are joining us faster than ever before because they value what a strong union can provide – support when they need it, strength to fight for change and a community that means you are never alone.

As the health crisis turns to an economic crisis, we will face more challenges. I will be here to lead this union until the end of this year – we still have a great deal of work to do together.

Thank you, for everything you have done. And everything you will continue to do – for our union, for public services and for our communities.



DAVE PRENTIS
GENERAL
SECRETARY

Dave Prentis

YORKSHIRE'S FINEST

In the eye of the storm of this deadly pandemic, our members have once again shown their heroic commitment to the nation's health.

It has been our members in the NHS and local government who have battled on the front-line, at great personal risk, to keep us all safe and well.

Public expressions of gratitude are certainly welcome, but the gushing praise of Tory ministers has a ring of hypocrisy. That is why we continue the fight for fair pay for all our members. They cannot pay their bills and feed their families with government rhetoric. We will never stop fighting for their skill and dedication to be

reflected in their pay packets.

And we are getting stronger by the day. Our membership is growing as more and more public sector workers realise how vital UNISON is for their future under this most hostile of Tory governments.

So much of our success is down to the superb leadership of our outgoing general secretary Dave Prentis.

Dave has been a tireless leader of UNISON for twenty years and his legacy is a powerful, dynamic union that is fully prepared for the many challenges which lie ahead.

Heartfelt thanks from us all to Dave, one of Yorkshire's finest exports. All the very best for a long and happy retirement.



WENDY NICHOLS
REGIONAL
CONVENOR

W. Nichols

CHRISTINA McANEA NOMINATED

The Yorkshire & Humberside regional committee has nominated Christina McAnea to be the next general secretary of UNISON.

The committee felt Christina was the best candidate to deliver on our members' priorities, because of her:

- Record of campaigning, particularly on issues affecting women, equalities and low-pay;
- Vast experience negotiating pay and conditions for members at a national level;
- Proud record of defending our members across all service groups;

- Credibility across the Labour and trade union movement;

Her election would also mean that a union representing over a million women will be led by a woman with all the relevant experience.



Christina McAnea

PLEASE USE YOUR VOTE

Members are set to elect a new leader for UNISON in our general secretary election.

The general secretary is the most senior role in the union and it's important that as many members as possible take part and vote for the person who will

best represent them.

Ballot papers were issued on October 28 to all eligible members with a prepaid envelope and the election period will close on November 27.

A voting helpline for members will be available from November

10 and will close on November 20.

Branches have a key role in increasing participation – helping to spread the word about this election and encouraging members to have their say. Click the links below for resources to get you started:

▶ 10 things branches can do to increase participation

▶ Q&A for activists

▶ Q&A for members

▶ Download the election poster

PROTECTING THE UNION

The union has issued important guidance to branches wishing to give out face coverings as a promotional item to members, or potential members.

Face coverings are not personal protective equipment (PPE) and are not designed to protect the wearer from infectious agents,

but to protect others. Reusable cloth face coverings must be washed before and after each use.

It is suggested that branches use UNISON's licensed supplier of promotional items, TC Branding Group. This ensures that products meet UNISON's strict supplier and code of

conduct criteria.

Face coverings bought by branches must be given to members with the clear instruction they are **not for work use** under any circumstances and must not be UNISON-branded. This is important to protect the union.



SURGE IN UNISON MEMBERSHIP

UNISON membership in Yorkshire and Humberside has increased substantially since the start of the pandemic.

Since January 1, UNISON experienced a net rise of 2,600 taking total membership in the region to around 133,000 as activists and officials reached out to workers in schools, care homes and other frontline workplaces ensuring they were fully aware of their right to work in a safe environment.

Regional manager Trevor Johnston, who joined from northern region in April, said there were concerns initially that recruitment might be more difficult because the lock-down meant the union could no longer have face-to-face contacts. "But as the crisis took hold, Yorkshire and Humberside UNISON's systematic campaigns gave us an even higher profile than ever," says Trevor. "This meant that as people became increasingly aware that they needed protection they knew UNISON was there for them."

Trevor has ensured that all new joiners are contacted and that members in the most high-risk areas such as social care are aware of the help available from the union.

He has instituted a systematic weekly check on membership figures on a branch-by-branch basis so that resources can be concentrated where they are needed. Nationally UNISON

YOUR ESSENTIAL PPE CHECKLIST

- FACE MASK** ☒
- GLOVES** ☒
- EYE SHIELD** ☒
- UNISON MEMBERSHIP** ☒



has recruited 152,000 new members over the first nine months of the year. The net increase is estimated to be 32,000 when leavers and retiring members are taken into account. It is calculated that three in ten of all new members are employed in the private sector.



Trevor Johnston

UNIVERSITY STAFF NEED TESTS

Thousands of university students and staff need urgent government action to provide test and trace facilities to avoid a "huge rise" in Covid infections.

The government's SAGE committee of medical and scientific advisors has warned of "huge spikes" in coronavirus in university towns and cities.

Nick Allen, chair of UNISON's regional higher education service group, said: "We have a major crisis now because although universities are

hosting these national Covid testing centres they are not open as a priority for students and staff."

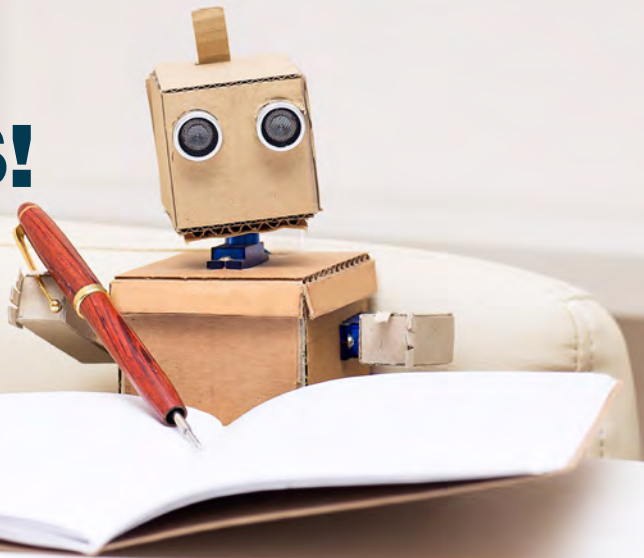
"The centres have been outsourced by the government to private companies such as Deloitte when they should be run by the NHS and priority should be determined locally not from a national call centre hundreds of miles away.

"Meanwhile our security staff are having to break up mass gatherings by students in halls of residences who are ignoring government guidance and university instructions."



Nick Allen

BEWARE THE 'BOTS!



Did consulting editor **Mary Maguire** write the fascinating media review below? Or was it a cunning robot? If the Guardian can carry a piece written by a droid, so could UNISON Active!

It's been a sombre news season. A global plague. Daily death tolls. PPE fiasco. Exam results fiasco. Incompetent government. Masks in banks encouraged. Social bubbles. Social distancing. Lockdown. Kids back at school. Kids quarantined. The R Rate. Test, track and lose the trail. Incompetent government. Go on holiday. Don't go on holiday. Doom and gloom.

Suddenly, from a galaxy far, far away a saviour arrived. Not so much a knight in shining armour, more a tin man, aka Star Wars' R2-D2. The loveable android came to earth via the Humber Bridge to raise money for a human charity (BBC Look North, Hull Daily Mail).

Picture desks across the region were in raptures. And editors had a new best friend – the robot. Bots, AI, droids, became all the rage and were soon harnessed to fight Covid19. BBC reported that Leeds University trialled robots to sanitise parts of the city centre and Leeds Bradford Airport. The robots found an area to sanitise then sprayed a fine mist. Clever.

The Yorkshire Post told us robots could “ease loneliness in older people in care homes”, beside a picture of a jolly elderly gent backed into a chair by a white plastic-encased, straight-backed bot with round flashing blue ears. The robot, called Pepper, is apparently “culturally competent”, has had several interesting outings, including visiting major newsrooms and giving evidence to parliament.

Piers Morgan and Susannah Reid invited a droid called Sophia, onto ITV's Good Morning Britain. Sophia, it transpired, could convey realistic facial expressions like smiling and blinking, although her hair did need some work. She told a joke and, when Morgan asked Sophia if she considered herself human, Sophia smiled indulgently before replying.

Editors lined up the usual boffins to analyse claims in the Sun and other terror-spreaders that robots would “raise one in three children in the future” – droids would feed, exercise and teach kids, change nappies and tell stories.

Artificial wombs would be the norm. Parents would be as obsolete as floppy discs. Fun times.

“Could we see robots wearing flat caps on Yorkshire farms?” asked Leeds-Live, as it gaily reported that bots will take over 2.3 million jobs. Reports of robotic dolphins, robotic dogs herding sheep, robot firefighters, fruit-pickers, cleaners and, according to the Mail, a robot that sweats like human beings. Nice.

It was only a matter of time before the headlines screamed of “killer robots”. To be fair, though, these weapons systems select and engage targets without human control – “ban ‘em” says the Mirror, along with 30 major countries. Only 30?

Stories of workers deliberately sabotaging robots and people kicking them when they are rolling down the streets, rang a bell. Apparently, not comforted by the tech boffins who were divided over whether robots will eventually kill us all in a terminator-style apocalypse.

Of course, if they don't get you physically, they may get your mind, as Bots and AI posing as ‘people’ with realistic human characteristics, features and personalities, invade social media as ‘virtual influencers’. To demonstrate their capacity, the Guardian employed a robot to write a 500-word op-ed on why humans have nothing to fear from AI. Robot GPT-3 included this:

“I am a servant of humans. I am only a set of code, governed by lines upon lines of code that encompass my mission statement.” It added: “Robots are just like us. They are made in our image”. Yep, scary. □



COULD WE SEE ROBOTS WEARING FLAT CAPS ON YORKSHIRE FARMS?



Mary Maguire

UNISON
Living



Great deals for work and play

If you're a member of UNISON, we won't just look after you at work, we'll be there for evenings, weekends and holidays too. We've chosen a range of fantastic deals to make your down time the best time.

For more information on UNISON Living visit **benefits.unison.org.uk**



'A CREDIT TO UNISON'

Activist Tony Smith has been dismissed by his employer after winning sick pay for 2,500 of his workmates. But Tony used a prolonged suspension from work to set up a food bank, writes **Peter Carroll**

When health and safety rep Tony Smith was suspended from work, he pledged to put the time to good use - by setting up a pioneering foodbank in Hull.

Five months later, Tony has been dismissed – but his determination to help those suffering the most

after years of austerity, has created something extraordinary.

The UNITY foodbank is now up and running in Hull, helping hundreds of people to feed their families. It is a hugely impressive achievement, particularly given the stress he must be under as his bosses do all in their power to sack him.

The employer, FCC, is a privatised waste recycling company, and Tony's problems began when he led the fight for sick pay for the drivers who handle the waste.

One of the 22 drivers, a UNISON steward, was suffering from cancer and having chemotherapy treatment and his colleagues went to visit him.

Tony (left) with nurse Matt Whale, UNISON steward at Hull Royal



OUR
MEMBERS
MUST HAVE
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WITH
PROTECTIVE
CLOTHING

Tony remembers the visit well. "We could all see that he was actually more worried about paying his bills than about the cancer. I thought, right, we've got to do something about this. It is disgraceful and causes great suffering.

"At that time the company paid no sick pay at all to its staff. Before the transport service was put out to tender in 2015, staff who became ill were entitled to full pay for six months and half pay for six months."

The members voted for strike action over the issue and won a memorable victory - but one that put Tony firmly in the crosshairs of the company's fury.

The victory in the strike meant the company not only had to provide sick pay to its employees in Hull - they had to start paying it to their staff at other sites throughout the country.

The total number of workers at FCC who now receive sick pay is 2,500.

Tony said: "It took us about a year to organise the strike and get to the ballot. About 20 of us went out on strike in Hull and we also won it for 2,500 people around the country. It was a very important victory, but I remember thinking at the time 'they'll never forgive me for this' and they obviously haven't."

The first shot fired was when Tony went down to UNISON's annual delegate conference in Brighton.

He hired a car to make the trip and inadvertently went 5mph over the speed limit on a road he wasn't familiar with.

The speeding charge had to be dropped but the company

dismissed Tony anyway.

UNISON campaigned against the decision and the company had to re-instate him.

Tony said: "Ultimately I think they thought it would be easier just to get rid of me. If they can sack me it would be very useful to them.

"People would see that happen and no-one would come forward to be health and safety reps. They would be frightened off it because the consequences are so serious."

The company's next attack was related to the way asbestos is taken away after being removed from buildings. Drivers collect asbestos dumped in rubble bins and take it away to be crushed.

But often they are not aware that asbestos is present on the site.

"I argued that our members should wear white protective suits when dealing with this toxic waste. I reckon that this is happening all over the country, putting people's health at risk.

"That's because it costs on average £700 to remove asbestos safely. Our members must have the right to be provided with protective clothing."

The company again suspended Tony for allegedly breaching health and safety rules. The irony is stark.

In total Tony was suspended for more than a year before his appeal was finally rejected by his employer.

UNISON is currently preparing to take the case to an employment tribunal alleging unfair dismissal.

But the Unity foodbank is an inspirational initiative in

Hull at a time of increasing poverty, and a tribute to Tony's strength and socialist principles.

The trades council in Hull and district discussed the urgent need for grassroots organisation to alleviate rising poverty.

It was agreed the foodbank project was vital.

Tony set about organising suppliers of food and signed up the Fairshare scheme where supermarkets that over-order donate the food to the foodbank.

He has been to schools and community centres throughout Hull and secured donations from unions - UNISON, Unite, the NEU, GMB and others.

And in a great example of community solidarity, the Kurdish community in Hull have donated premises rent-free.

Many foodbanks will only provide food for individuals six times a year, and some require documentation to prove need.

Tony said: "We want to cut bureaucracy, to help anyone in need. I have been very busy delivering food around the city. We are out to help zero hours and minimum wage workers and the demand for help is growing. It is wonderful to deliver food to people who are destitute, to help them survive, and most importantly give them hope."

Regional organiser Joe Gibbins praised Tony for his achievement.

He said: "He is a wonderful human being. Despite all he has been through, he has always worked tirelessly for the poor and the oppressed. He's a credit to UNISON." □



IT IS
WONDERFUL
TO DELIVER
FOOD
TO PEOPLE
WHO ARE
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TO HELP
THEM
SURVIVE



It's been four and a half years since the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, dreamed up plans to increase the "small claims limit" for road accidents and workplace claims from £1,000 to £5,000.

It would have meant a person injured through no fault of their own would have to pay legal fees for any claim worth less than £5000, rather than the person or organisation who was responsible for the injury.

Since then, we've seen the publication of the Civil Liability Bill which was tweaked to limit the increase for work accidents to £2,000.

It was further amended so that 'vulnerable road users' (VRUs) – cyclists, pedestrians, motorcyclists and horse riders – together with "protected people" including children - were exempt from any increase in the limit.

The Bill came into effect in April this year but its implementation has been delayed by the pandemic until at least April next year.

The delay gives the Government time to reflect on who is the real target of this legislation. Is the Act going to stick to its stated aim - to curb allegedly outrageous whiplash claims - or are ministers willing to limit access to justice for others?

While the Government has tweaked the bill, so far it seems unconcerned about the impact that the proposed legislation will have on workers across the UK.

For generations, the fundamental principle in law was that the "polluter pays". In this case it meant that those responsible for the injury to the worker paid for his or her independent legal advice. Under this system the injured party got the full compensation for their injuries and losses, without lawyers' fees being deducted.

The Johnson government appears willing to rip that up. The 90 per cent of injured workers whose claims are



THE
ANSWER
ISN'T TO
UNLEASH
CLAIMS
COMPANIES
AND COLD
CALLERS
ON INJURED
WORKERS

A DENIAL OF JUSTICE

Tom Jones, head of policy at Thompsons Solicitors, urges ministers to scrap proposed changes to the small claims limit which would deny justice to hundreds of thousands of injured workers

worth less than £2,000 face fighting well-funded insurers on their own, or see lawyers' fees come out of damages the court had decided should be for them.

Since August last year, Thompsons, shopworkers' union USDAW, the Association of British Insurers (ABI), the Law Society and the British Safety Council supported by UNISON, have been making the public case that Employers Liability (EL) and Public Liability (PL) claims aren't the same as road accident whiplash claims - which is what the Civil Liability Act was meant to be all about.

Unlike with whiplash claims, no one has said that there is a problem with fraudulent EL or PL claims or a boom in them. In fact, the numbers are, thankfully, dropping due to better health and safety. Ministry of Justice figures show there were around 27,000 personal injury claims in the final quarter of 2019 - down five per cent on the previous quarter and the lowest level since 2011.

The Government has promised that the whiplash reforms will result in lower motor insurance premiums. Putting to one side our doubts that there will be any, or any long term reductions,

it is noticeable that no insurer has said (or even mentioned) that it is essential for EL and PL to be included in the small claims increase in order for them to deliver the premium reductions promised. It's clear that taking EL and PL out of the equation won't have any impact on premiums.

In Scotland, accident at work claims don't go into their equivalent of a small claims process. If the Prime Minister means it when he talks about a "United Kingdom", a good place to start would be to have a system in place that means that workers in England and Wales are offered the same legal protection and recognition as those north of the border.

The answer isn't to unleash claims companies and cold callers on injured workers - which is a real risk. And doubling the small claims limit for employer's liability cases will place strains on an already creaking justice system, by increasing the number of unrepresented claimants and encouraging claims management companies and their dreaded cold calling (which the Government chose not to clamp down on).

Here is a test for ministers who were elected with lots of warm words about workers' rights being safe in their hands after Brexit. Will they stand by injured workers' rights now?

Will the Government listen to those who are normally their friends at the Association of British Insurers and back off from an increase in the limit in workplace injury claims before it is too late, or plough on regardless and in doing so reveal how unsafe workers' rights really are in their hands? □

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HERE IS
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ABOUT
WORKERS'
RIGHTS



HOLD ON TO YOUR SEATS!

UNISON members face a period of extreme political turbulence at a national and local level. With the benefit of years of experience in Westminster, Mirror man **Paul Routledge** looks into his crystal ball

What a difference less than a year makes! Sir Keir Starmer is ahead of Boris Johnson as the nation's choice of prime minister.

And Labour is neck and neck with the Tories – ahead in some polls – an extraordinary change of fortune after the party's worst defeat in living memory.

Sir Keir's forensic performances at prime minister's questions leave blustering Bojo looking like an Oxford Union debating society amateur. Which is precisely what he was.

The Covid-19 pandemic found him out. His jokey, arm-waving, policy-on-the-hoof style of leadership simply isn't up to the crisis. Thousands have died because he failed to meet the

challenges.

Former Tory premiers publicly despair, and even his friends in the media have given up. One prominent pal urged him to “get Brexit done” and quit.

That won't happen. My judgment is a stalemate at Westminster, with Johnson doggedly hanging on, hoping for a coronavirus vaccine to rescue him from a potential revolt by his back-benchers.

Desperate to hold on to last December's political gains – nine Labour seats in our region – he's promising (yet again) to “level up” by decanting 22,000 civil service jobs here by 2030.

All we've had from him so far, are some patronising remarks about “selfless Northerners” determined not to be beaten by the virus. And even that was

sent from London in a pre-recorded virtual appearance to the so-called Great Northern Conference.

Chancellor Sunak, favourite to succeed Johnson, scrapped his autumn budget in favour of a one-year spending review, pledging long-term investment in the “cornerstones of our society, like the NHS and schools”. We'll see. He's very much a “balance the books” man.

Another political pachyderm lurks in the room: Europe. Leaving the EU institutions was easy. But this government isn't up to the hard part of creating a coherent new relationship with Europe.

I've always assumed that Johnson and his swivel-eyed Brexiteer pals like Sir Rentagob – Iain Duncan Smith – don't



SO MANY
HAVE DIED
BECAUSE
JOHNSON
FAILED AT
EVERY
STAGE



want a comprehensive trade agreement with our largest single market. They want to crash out, putting the ailing economy in even greater risk to satisfy their ideological hatred of Europe. As Active! went to press, negotiations restarted.

Away from turbulent Westminster, politics is no less seething in our region. Having refused to heed the voice of local people who supported a One Yorkshire devolution plan, Tory ministers are now imposing new systems of local government.

West Yorkshire is to have a metro mayor, elected in council polls on May 6. Susan Hinchcliffe, leader of Bradford city council, is emerging as front-runner to be the Labour candidate. Tracy Brabin, the former Coronation Street actor

and MP for Batley and Spen, has also thrown her hat into the ring.

The winner will oversee the county's five local authorities – Leeds, Bradford, Kirklees, Calderdale and Wakefield – with a “mayoral authority” of five elected members from each council, plus three more to reflect the county's political make-up. Sound complicated? It looks like the proverbial camel, a horse designed by a committee.

And this for a paltry – in public spending terms – £38 million plus a greater say in local transport. That's massively less than has been taken from councils in the last decade. Judith Blake, Labour leader of Leeds, admits:

“We recognise this is the only show in town, and the only opportunity to get money out of Whitehall and under our control.”

Frankly, I see this as a glorified Leeds city region, in much the same way that Dan Jarvis's South Yorkshire is Sheffield plus the rest. The new mayor will have limited powers, as the pandemic shutdowns in Manchester showed.

In the aftermath of last December's partial demolition of the “Red Wall” of traditional Labour parliamentary constituencies, the Tories believe they can do the double: win against the odds in West Yorkshire and install a patsy politician in a county that currently has a complete Red Map of councils.

The picture in North Yorkshire is much less clear. The Tories want a single unitary authority, but their own councillors are squabbling like ferrets in a sack over the proposed abolition of their long-established authorities like Hambleton and Ryedale.

They will have whatever useless communities secretary Robert Jenrick decides to give them.

With reports of up to 3,000 council posts in the region under threat, UNISON says it will oppose any compulsory job cuts. Wendy Nichols, regional convenor, says: “Our members are busy delivering essential services and supporting the response to the Covid-19 emergency.

“Local government reorganisation is the last thing they need now. However, we are pragmatic, and we recognise the government's intentions are clear. They want a unitary system from April 2022, and our focus across all our branches in North Yorkshire will be to secure the best outcome for our members and the communities they serve.”

These two coups d'état for local government are just part of a pattern. Dozens more elected mayors and council abolitions are coming down the track in a bid to smash Labour strongholds.

At Westminster, the Yorkshire cohort of Labour MPs has significant clout in Keir Starmer's shadow cabinet. Rachel Reeves takes on Michael Gove at the cabinet office, John Healey has defence and Louise Haigh has the heavy responsibility of Northern Ireland.

Among the influential commons committee chairs, Hilary Benn has future relations with the EU, Clive Betts retains local government and Yvette Cooper at home affairs holds to account Priti Patel, arguably the most unpleasant member of the cabinet.

My crystal ball for 2021 is partly-cloudy. But through the haze I see the better days promised by Capt Sir Tom Moore. □

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UP TO
3,000
COUNCIL
POSTS
UNDER
THREAT



Wendy Nichols:
Union focusing
on best outcome
for members



PLAUDITS DON'T PAY THE BILLS



Regional convenor **Wendy Nichols** welcomes praise for UNISON members for their courage during the crisis, but now she says they need tangible improvements in pay and conditions

These past nine months have been the most unsettling and frightening period most of us will have experienced. The trauma of dealing with coronavirus will be with us all for a long time. We may have our own personal fears, for loved ones who are shielding, for our elderly relatives in care homes, for our children's futures, for colleagues in the thick of it, or we may have suffered personal tragedies. The impact of this pandemic has magnified the fragility of our

health and our economy.

Covid-19, just like other major global catastrophes, has redefined the true worth of "service" workers. When you are sick or dying with Covid, when you can't go to the shops for food, when you want your kids to feel safe at school, when you lose your job, it's not the company directors, or the hedge fund managers or the bankers you turn to, it's UNISON members and other service workers. And, whether or not we have a further wave of this dreaded virus, it's those workers who will continue to

get us through it.

Elsewhere in this edition of Active! we document the experiences of an ICU nurse in Leeds General Infirmary and a Barnsley care home worker. These harrowing accounts are typical of the stories told by so many of our members on the front-line, battling to keep people alive.

I am so proud of our members in all the public services. They have demonstrated their dedication and commitment to keeping communities safe and well, keeping gas, electricity and water



FROM
SOCIAL
WORKER,
TO STREET
SWEEPER,
UNISON
MEMBERS
ARE
KEEPING
SOCIETY
TOGETHER

supplied, providing safety and security whether for students or the vulnerable. They've kept going, despite the personal risks, many on low pay, many not knowing whether they will have a job at the end of it.

In councils across Yorkshire & Humberside, many of our members have been organising and helping with food distribution to the vulnerable and to those who are shielding, keeping the streets safe and clean, finding shelter for the homeless and dealing with the fall-out as more people are pushed into poverty. From social worker, to street-sweeper, UNISON members are keeping society together.

WARNINGS

The Government's response has been nothing short of criminal, whether in lockdown measures or in the spectacular failure of emergency planning and the provision of proper PPE.

For ministers, clapping for carers was something that looked good on TV. Or thanking key workers was just more warm words.

They were never going to put money where their mouths are. Publicly, they pledged to do "whatever it takes", but cash has been dished out on unusable PPE, to private companies for failed testing and tracking systems, but not where it is most needed. The Tory Government's tribute to nurses, for example, was to send warnings to them every day that unless they pay £120 registration fee, they won't be allowed to practise. This, when we needed every single health care worker.

In the debate on schools re-opening to all pupils, again the Government chaotically announced its decision with no plans in place, yet again putting public sector workers at risk. Nearly 60 per cent of schools staff are support workers, many UNISON members, whether a teaching assistant, an administrator, school meals worker or a cleaner. Of course children should be in school, learning and socialising with their friends, but with a plan in place to keep them, their parents and staff safe. UNISON has been working with headteachers in the region to make sure proper safety measures are in place, that cleaners and other staff have the right PPE.

Some employers have not covered themselves with glory in the way they treat their staff. Managers at Sheffield University, for example, threatened to fire and rehire 8,000 non-academic staff on worse terms and conditions, but UNISON forced senior managers to withdraw the threat. And workers in St. Anne's charity care homes in Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield and Kirklees faced the threat of slashed pay and conditions.

UNSUNG

UNISON itself has been fantastic in the way that it has supported members and the community throughout the pandemic and will continue to do so. Advice, support and guidance is constantly updated on the website. Our officers have been in action supporting

members locally, and nationally demanding proper protection for workers and arguing the case for sick pay for those who had to self-isolate.

Our Charity, There For You, has had a record number of calls for help as members themselves struggle to make ends meet. And many of our branches, including my own, donated money to local food banks. We've had a considerable growth in membership with a net increase of 2,500 in the region.

DAMAGING

Whatever happens next, we can't go back to the way we were. We can't allow the Government to get away with expecting our members to pay the cost of Covid. There cannot be another damaging round of austerity. We want the plaudits for our public sector workers, who put themselves in harm's way during this crisis, turned into tangible improvements in pay and conditions. The road-sweeper, the refuse collector, the cleaner, the bus driver, the delivery driver, the shelf-stacker and all the other unsung heroes – they all deserve our thanks – but they also deserve a decent standard of living. □

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TO HELL AND BACK



The impact of the pandemic on frontline staff was little short of horrific. But there were moments of triumph too. **Peter Carroll** and **Barrie Clement** meet two UNISON members who, like members of the RAF in the Second World War, can truly be described as ‘the best of us’

The ritual public applause and saucepan banging for NHS staff dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic are now a distant memory.

But for those still risking their physical and mental health caring for the sick and the dying, the battle, more or less unreported, goes on.

Intensive Care Unit nurse Janie Saxton has worked throughout the pandemic at Leeds General Infirmary and St James's Hospital.

The 28-year-old UNISON member has been nursing for six years, and trained as a specialist ICU nurse.

“When we all first became aware of the virus and how it was spreading there was a period of eerie silence. It was the calm before the storm,” said Janie.

The devastating storm duly arrived and Janie and her colleagues were urgently needed at the LGI and St James's as the numbers of Covid-19 patients started to surge.

“Dealing with this was strategically very challenging because we were working in pods to make sure we weren't spreading the virus. It was very stressful and we could all see the toll it was taking on us and all the NHS staff.

“We were all anxious, we knew we were all run down and many of us were getting sick, and still are, as a result of all the mental and physical stress.”

Wearing PPE masks, gowns and gloves throughout a gruelling 12-hour shift is far more exhausting than most of us can imagine.

“It is really hot and very uncomfortable. And most of us have facial skin problems from wearing the masks all day and night. But there is no other way to keep staff and patients safe,” says Janie.

However, she embraces all the “positive outcomes”



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that she has witnessed with some very sick patients and tells one heart-warming story:

"Many of our patients were critically ill and in grave danger of passing away, however a handful of them turned a corner over a period of four weeks. One patient in particular was critically unwell and unstable during the peak, but then I saw him a couple of weeks later and he was awake with a tracheostomy tube in place - an intervention that many of our recuperating COVID patients needed to improve their condition. I was delighted to see him. He was fine and was recovering really well. It is such a positive outcome and very encouraging for us.

"That helps us to balance all the sad and upsetting situations we have to deal with during this crisis."

Obviously there were situations which Janie and her colleagues found extremely distressing.

"We have had to turn some relatives away due to our strict visiting regimes (including temperature checks on arrival) which completely goes against our caring nature with many of us finding these particular situations very very hard; especially when the patients they're trying to visit have been so sick.

"Some people had to say goodbye to loved ones via their mobiles and that is very upsetting for any bereaved family. We have been called heartless by some families because we have to enforce those rules but we have no choice.

"And this virus is not over

by any means. We expect the pressure to continue."

At the start of the crisis, everyone, quite rightly, paid homage to the frontline hospital staff like Janie who were coping with the pandemic. Few, unless they were directly involved, were aware of the horrific situation in which care home workers found themselves.

In particular they were unaware of the sheer numbers of Covid-carrying elderly hospital patients who were dispatched to care homes to meet whatever fate was ahead of them. Many of them died and infected other elderly residents, placing a huge burden on low-paid, under-valued care home staff. More than 20,000 care home residents in England died of the disease up until the end of June. At the peak of the pandemic 400 were dying every day. Hundreds of care home staff lost their lives.

UNISON activist Samantha Hobson managed

to survive what was, at some stages, akin to a frontline hospital in a war.

To some extent her place of work, Valley Park Care Home, Wombwell, near Barnsley, was ahead of the game. A fortnight before lockdown the manager decided to stop relatives visiting residents.

For some time those she cared for displayed no symptoms. Then one morning one of the residents said he felt unwell. "We took his temperature and found it was just under 38 degrees and we panicked a little bit," said Samantha. "Within ten minutes, another resident felt unwell and started throwing up." Within hours five elderly people had been sent back to their rooms with a range of serious symptoms. "That day was just a blur," she says.

"We sent them to hospital and they were all sent back the same day some of them hadn't been treated. The staff were scared.

"I told them they needed >

SOME
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THEIR
MOBILES

ICU nurse Janie Saxton – heart-warming stories



Photo: Vicky Matthews

Photo: Mark Harvey



Residential care worker Sam Hobson told colleagues they should join UNISON

to join UNISON and seven of them did. I told them the union had been fantastic for me."

A sense of solidarity certainly came in useful. At one stage they tried to admit a patient from hospital, but management were given an ultimatum. "We had eight staff working that day and six of us said we are going home if the patient wasn't tested. We put our foot down. We said if you bring this resident in, you will lose your staff. I don't know if this is the right thing to say, but the staff at our home have got balls on them."

"At one stage we had seven ambulances in our car park. Everyone of the care home employees was helping out. The senior care staff, the manager, deputy manager, the admin staff. One day there were so many poorly residents it was unreal."

"Some residents were taken to hospital and they were sent back to die without anything to help them. No oxygen, no nothing. Some went to hospital in the morning and

were back in the care home by tea time. One died within 24 hours of being sent back."

"On one occasion three of us went into a resident's room to get her on to her bed and she passed away soon after. Within 20 minutes another lady took her last breath. It was awful she seemed to be drowning and choking. We were trying to keep calm. After an hour another resident passed away."

"Eventually we were numb to it. We would walk in each morning and ask who else we'd lost during the night. One week at least one resident a day passed away." There was an occasion when a member of staff just dropped on the floor saying: "It's just awful to watch them and there's nowt you can do. You're just helpless."

In order to protect her 10-year-old daughter from the disease, Samantha took her to stay with her mother. She would sit in the garden and talk to her little girl through the window. But she had very little time to see

her because she was working 12 hour shifts, six or seven days a week. "There was no question of giving up work. I wouldn't be able to live on Universal Credit," she says.

The owners offered to put £100 in the pay packets of each member of staff to show appreciation for what they had been through. "It was insulting," said Samantha. "It was a kick in the teeth. Everyone turned it down. One of the staff had passed the disease on to her 10-year-old son. She nearly lost him."

"One of them told a manager that he could shove the £100 up his arse."

A meagre, one-off handout is offensively inadequate. Society owes them our deep gratitude, but it also owes them decent wages and conditions.

Janie and Samantha were among "the few" - doing so much, for so many. It is a sentiment we have cherished from an earlier, deadly threat to the world.

Like our RAF in World War Two, people like Janie and Samantha are the best of us. □



SOME RESIDENTS WERE TAKEN TO HOSPITAL AND THEY WERE SENT BACK HERE TO DIE"



The Black
Lives Matter
movement
has rightly
focused

attention on racism in all its forms. Here feature writer **Ruth McGuire** assesses the barriers to promotion faced by black people in the region

You've heard of the "Glass Ceiling", well allow me to introduce you to the "Snowy Peaks". Basically it means the higher up you go in public sector organisations, the whiter the staff.

The topographical analogy works when you apply it to the presence of black and minority ethnic (BAME) people in senior leadership roles, but it also applies to the challenges faced by BAME staff in climbing their way to the top.

The vivid phrase comes from a 2014 report by Roger Kline "Snowy white peaks of the NHS: a survey of discrimination in governance and leadership and the potential impact on patient care in London and England."

Fast forward to 2020 and Yorkshire & Humberside where the discrimination clearly continues - the higher the NHS pay band, the lower the proportion of BAME staff. Across the region, the percentage of BAME people appointed to executive level posts in trusts, ranges from zero in the vast majority of cases to 22 per cent in one trust (Workforce Race Equality Standard 2019 data).

The picture is similarly bleak at local authorities. A 2018 "Local Government Leadership" report carried out by recruitment agency Green Park didn't mince

RACE TO THE TOP



Photo: Mark Harvey



YOU'LL SEE LOTS OF BLACK FACES AROUND THE PLACE, BUT YOU WON'T SEE THEM AS MANAGERS

John Campbell

its words. "The proportion of BAME representation in local government leadership positions is woeful."

Precise figures for all the employers covered by UNISON in the region are not available. But Abdul Rashid, chair of UNISON's regional black members' group, suggests that the representation of BAME staff in senior roles at local authorities remains as Green Park describes: woeful.

This is confirmed by a report for Leeds City Council, "Equality Improvement Priorities Summary 2018 - 2022 Tackling poverty and reducing inequalities. Update August 2019". It makes clear that "increasing the representation of employees with protected characteristics at leadership and management levels" in the local authority is an area in need of substantial improvement.

The report points out that, "our current workforce profile demonstrates that we are not representative of the city (compared to 2011 census data), and the five year trend since 2011 shows that there has not been much real change or improvement in our workforce diversity." Meanwhile in Sheffield, the second largest city in the region, its "Council Workforce Employee Report 1st

April 2018 to 31st March 2019" confirmed that BAME staff are underrepresented in the most senior roles.

BARRIER

John Campbell, deputy regional convenor, suggests that "unconscious bias and white privilege" are two of the reasons for the poor representation of BAME staff in leadership roles.

He says: "I know of nurses within a South Yorkshire hospital who were often asked to mentor and support others such as matrons and directors in their new roles. These nurses were considered good enough to be mentors, but not good enough for promotion. I also know a black man who has three degrees including a Masters but he's only a clerical officer. He's constantly applying for promotions but never gets the job."

He adds: "You'll see lots of black faces around the place, but you won't see them as managers." Similarly, Abdul who works with members from local authorities, education and other local public services, believes that indirect discrimination is also a barrier to the progression of BAME staff. "Equality policies are in place but not always the practice," he says. "You see the

indirect discrimination in the lack of opportunities and lack of promotion of BAME staff. Members also feel that they have to be twice as good as a white person to get promotions. For black women, the situation is even worse, they are even less likely to get into senior positions."

In theory the Equality Act should protect members from racial discrimination. However, enforcing the law is another mountain that BAME members have to climb. Abdul says that only about thirty percent of cases he and his colleagues deal with are sent onto Thompsons Solicitors. "Often, this is because members have left it too late to submit a claim and by the time they decide to act, they have already passed the three-month deadline."

In addition to racial discrimination, some black members face outright racist abuse at work. John Campbell said: "I know some nursing staff who've been called the 'N' word but when they reported the abuse, managers were reluctant to call in the police."

"It was only when UNISON intervened that action was taken. I also know of international nurses who faced horrendous abuse and were even spat on. Incidents were reported to managers,



but nothing was done.” In other cases, while explicitly racist language has not been used to abuse staff, derogatory language has been.

A case in point is that of IT engineer Sandy Sheun who brought a successful claim against his employers, Northern General Hospital (Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust) for racial harassment.

His complaint was successfully upheld by an employment tribunal in January and widely reported in the media. The tribunal upheld Sandy’s complaint and found that his dignity was ‘undermined’ by the behaviour of colleagues who regularly mimicked the Chinese accent and made ‘Kung Fu’ noises.

A further barrier faced by black members is the disproportionate risk they face of being disciplined or being subjected to capability proceedings. National NHS statistics show that BAME staff are more likely to face disciplinary action than their white colleagues. From his work with members in other sectors, Abdul agrees. He says: “Black members tend to get pulled up on capability issues, but white members get training, development and support to improve.”

Fine sounding policies and often superficial equality training courses are not enough to ensure that black members are treated fairly and equally. “Activism” is needed by both employers and UNISON. Employers need to actively review and revise their recruitment practices to root out the unconscious bias which leaves recruiters appointing people that look like themselves.

“Organisations need to look at recruitment panels to make sure that there is someone on the panel who understands equality and diversity issues,” Abdul suggests. “More needs to be done at the recruitment stage but also to support BAME members when they are appointed to senior roles because they will face double the issues faced by their white colleagues.”

Positive action is also needed to encourage and support BAME members to apply for more senior roles and to ensure they have equal access to the training and opportunities that will equip them to take on leadership roles. John says: “Staff need to be encouraged to take on supervisory roles and the boardroom has to lead on this. NHS England also has to take the lead.”

There is also a role for

UNISON in leading by example. BAME members in senior roles within the union are few and far between and according to one official, applications to senior roles from BAME members are “disappointing”. So, can UNISON do more to ensure black members are well represented in senior roles? Are senior roles advertised widely and in ethnic media for example? And given that discrimination is not going away anytime soon, UNISON needs to do more to ensure members and union reps are competent and confident to take legal action to “stand up to racism”, racial harassment and discrimination.

ABHORRENT

Convenor for the West Yorkshire Combined Authority Pam Sian points out that events that have taken place across the world since the murder of George Floyd have not only drawn attention to the abhorrent police brutality that led to Mr Floyd’s death. “The Black Lives Matters movement has also rightly focused attention on systematic and structural racism more widely in our society. It has given us all cause to question whether we are doing enough to create change and reduce racial inequality.” □



FOR BLACK WOMEN, THE SITUATION IS EVEN WORSE

Abdul Rashid



IT HAS GIVEN US ALL CAUSE TO QUESTION WHETHER WE ARE DOING ENOUGH

Pam Sian





IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE

In Norway around 36 per cent of the 5.5 million people in employment are in unions, compared with 21 per cent of the 26.5 million employees in the UK. So why is Norway so successful at union recruitment? UNISON local organiser **Danny Marten** finds out

It's summer 1985 in Oslo and the Norwegian TUC Landsorganisasjonen i Norge (LO) are walking through town introducing themselves to young workers. Their mission, to make sure the people they meet, working in offices, cafes and bars, all know their rights at work.

Each summer, the Norwegian law dictates that workers get three weeks leave, the result is that many youngsters, who may still be at school, get their first crack at work. It's during this window that LO decided to patrol the workplaces, more often than not, signing them up to a trade union.

This model of recruitment became known as the "Summer Patrol". It's a model that's lasted more than 30 years, and has ensured the continuation of mass union membership. It's this summer patrol method that a group of young trade unionists from Yorkshire have brought to the UK.

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Members of the patrol - UNISON activists Lois and Chris

Things have moved on a bit since 1985. Gone are the “scrunchies” and shoulder pads. In are selfie sticks and smart phones. And this is how I found a group of 35 young trade unionists on the streets of Barnsley town centre last year, as they performed their very own summer patrol, talking to young workers in shops, pubs and restaurants; talking to them about their rights at work. Alas it wasn’t possible this summer because of the pandemic, but the campaign is very much alive.

REACTION

The questions young people were being asked were simple: “Do you know what the minimum wage is and are you being paid above it?”; “Do you have a written contract?”; “Do you know how to complain if things aren’t OK at work?” and most importantly “are you in a trade union?”

The reaction was far better than you might imagine. Young workers appreciated being spoken to like adults. For many, this would form a positive first impression of trade unions. Young workers are sometimes so engaged, trade unionists can get drawn into 30-minute conversations.

UNISON NEC member Lois Tavernor went on a series of patrols until the lockdown last March and one socially-distanced patrol since. She says the recruitment initiatives have slowed down in some senses because of the pandemic, but speeded up in other ways.

Along with Christian Townsend of the UNISON branch at Sheffield University, she has joined the “Sheffield Needs a Pay Rise”

campaign, a partnership between Sheffield Trades Council and the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers’ Union.

Last summer the campaign, backed by trade unionists from all over Sheffield, won two months’ back pay for employees at a Papa John’s pizza franchise in Ecclesall Road. The businessman running the franchise shut it down without notice. Employees knew nothing about the closure until they turned up for work and found the premises locked.

The Sheffield campaign has also kept going via social media. “We’re in regular contact with people through WhatsApp groups, in fact the whole thing has been snowballing,” she said.

OPTIONS

Lois, a 27-year-old shop steward at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals where she is a clerical officer, said: “I think all young people in Britain agree that work brings with it big problems, low wages, casual work, underemployment and harassment. It’s important young workers are told about their options, told they have a voice.

“Young people seem to believe the myth that if things are bad at work their only choice is to move on and try to get a better deal, or put up with it. That simply isn’t true, all the best places to work are highly unionised. The only effective way to improve things for young workers, is to stand together in trade unions.”

Chris, a shop steward and membership officer at his branch, has been on numerous patrols at different

times of the year. He said: “It’s really simple, we go into a workplace, usually where young people are likely to be employed and we engage them in a conversation. It’s all about the worker, what issues do they face and how can trade unions help them.

“Often the trade union movement think we need to do something really clever or re-invent the wheel to recruit members. In reality we just need to get back to bread and butter organising, talking to members about their issues.”

VICTORY

Chris, 23, points out that before the Job Retention Scheme was announced last March the campaign recorded an important victory over pub chain Mitchell and Butlers. Workers organised across Sheffield branches of the chain and bosses gave in to demands for sick pay and a guarantee of no job losses.

Kent Logan Jelle, who works for the Norwegian TUC, was one of the half-dozen of his compatriots who coached and mentored the young British trade unionists. He said: “Because of Brexit there are lots of questions about workers’ rights in the UK. Lots of politicians talk about the ‘Norwegian model’ but in Norway most of the workforce is in a union.

“These young British workers might not always be in shops, they might go on to work in public services. They may join USDAW as a result of a conversation, but in a few years they may become a UNISON member.” □

*Additional reporting
by Barrie Clement*

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WORKING WONDERS

Active! reporter **Christine Buckley** speaks to two highly committed activists who transformed a moribund UNISON branch into what is now being seen as a 'beacon for the union'

Eighteen months ago, UNISON's branch at NHS Supplies North, a warehouse supplying hospitals throughout the north of England, was in the doldrums.

People weren't attending meetings, there was no campaigning, the office was somewhat sorry for itself and there wasn't even any recruitment material.

Fast forward to today and membership has increased by a massive 30 per cent, there has been a big push on campaigning - especially on women's issues - and the branch, in Normanton, West Yorkshire is now being seen

as beacon for the union. So, what has brought about the dramatic turnaround?

Many people would point the finger of praise at Steve Jones who became branch secretary early last year. But he would also highlight the dynamism and compassion of Pam Henderson, the branch's women's officer. Together, they are a powerful force.

Warehouse operative Steve, who has also been a health and safety officer and a shop steward for UNISON, knew that the branch needed a big injection of vitality and to reach out to more members.

Steve, who had been to UNISON's national conferences, was also

struck by the fact that very few women were involved in the branch. While acknowledging that it is a male-dominated workplace, he'd seen how many women were active at national conferences and wanted to encourage more women to be involved in the branch.

"We'd not got any women involved and that was wrong. UNISON nationally is mostly made up of women members and I found that many at the conferences quite inspired me."

Steve needed to look no further than his co-worker Pam. She had clocked up 26 years of UNISON membership but had not been



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active in the branch. It was a struggle with the menopause which galvanised her into action.

She says: "Sometimes when you have a bad hot flush you have to walk off the shopfloor and that can be embarrassing for both the men and the women. Men who don't know what you're going through, may question how many breaks you need. Once a manager told me that I needed to keep carrying on with my work. I don't want anyone else to go through that."

So, the branch has this year – during the very challenging time of the coronavirus pandemic - put

a huge amount of work into raising awareness of the menopause and work. It's had a menopause day, created menopause 'champions' – women workers who others can go to if they have problems at work and need help.

Steve thinks that the union can demonstrate its support for members through its work on the menopause. "Covid will hopefully go away soon but the menopause will always be with us." He says that Pam, a mum and grandmum, will inspire other generations.

The branch has not only raised awareness among workers and managers, it has also achieved an important practical result and got the women's uniforms changed. Now they are made of natural fibres and are not so hot. Pam says: "I cannot believe we got the uniform changed; it makes such a difference."

And with an eye on recruitment opportunities, there are even UNISON logo handheld fans to help sufferers cool down in a hot flush.

ACCESSIBLE

Along with campaigning work, the 190-strong branch has reinvigorated itself with some basic housekeeping actions such as making branch meetings more accessible.

Previously, they were held on a Saturday morning, a time when no-one works on the site, meaning that people had to go in on their day off. Now they are held at a working men's club and timed to fit in with shifts. And the office has gone from a dreary space to one that is awash with purple UNISON

merchandise.

Steve says he's had a huge amount of support from the union's officials especially when he first became branch secretary and faced a sharp learning curve. "I couldn't give UNISON Yorkshire and Humberside more praise, they have been brilliant." He says he's had invaluable practical help and encouragement from organisers Lynda Marshall, Cath Bacon and Carol Dewrow.

CONFIDENCE

And the feeling is mutual. Lynda says: "When Steve Jones became branch secretary he was like a breath of fresh air. Steve has worked wonders with the branch and taken it to a different level."

Steve says that his work with UNISON has also boosted his morale. "It's given me confidence. I was incredibly shy. It's hard to believe now because it's hard to shut me up. It made me step out of my comfort zone."

Along with the menopause campaigning the branch has also done work on mental health at work. Next up is likely to be work to tackle domestic violence and sexual harassment, both underlining that UNISON can help people in difficulties and that they don't have to suffer in silence.

Steve is proud of the branch's achievements although he is constantly at pains to credit Pam and other branch members. It would be hard to find a more enthusiastic activist for the union and he shows no sign of easing up any time soon. "I love doing this," he says. "When I do my best and people are happy, that keeps me doing it." □

“WHEN I DO MY BEST AND PEOPLE ARE HAPPY, THAT KEEPS ME DOING IT

KULDEEP'S GOT IT SEWN UP

Ryan Fletcher meets a UNISON activist who started as a low-paid home worker, took a degree in counselling and now works in health and social care commissioning at Leeds City Council



WE WERE WORKING TO MAKE SURE WE WERE OK AND GOT WHAT WE NEEDED

Kuldeep Bajwa's first career began when she was 11 years old at her family home in Birmingham.

Along with her mum, five brothers and two sisters, the industrious child would stitch garments to supplement the family's income.

Not only would Kuldeep, 60, go on to become an accomplished dressmaker but her experiences in the often exploitative world of home-based manufacturing for fashion suppliers would also inform her UNISON activism

and social work career in later life.

"All of us used to help out. It was something that was just natural. My mum used to embroider and my sister studied embroidery in Panang, Malaysia, where we used to live before we moved to England. Because I started when I was so young I ended up being really fast," said Kuldeep.

"I've never thought of it as a chore. We were working to make sure we were OK and got what we needed. We played, we did other stuff, but

the main thing was that we had good food."

Kuldeep's father, Dalbara, served in the British Army during the Second World War and the family moved to England from their home in Punjab, India, after the fighting ended.

Though Kuldeep has fond memories of her childhood, the traditional path she followed – leaving education early to work full time and an arranged marriage at 17 – was one she vowed her own children would not follow.

"I made a promise to

myself that I would not let my children do that. They took on summer jobs, but I made sure the children studied and made their own choices," she said.

After getting married Kuldeep had two children, a girl, Amandeep, who is a solicitor, and a boy, Gurjeeven, who is an executive at Sony, and the family eventually settled in West Yorkshire.

It was here in 1990 where Kuldeep, who was still working as a sewing machinist making overcoats, began her second career after applying for a job at the Yorkshire and Humber Low Pay Unit, a charity that provided support for low paid workers in the region.

"I didn't expect to get the job because I didn't have any qualifications. During the interview I just talked about how home garment workers like myself were really poorly paid. I actually got the job and started working in Kirklees to support women who were working from home," recalled Kuldeep.

"Even when I was working at home I used to say to my employer: you're not paying me the correct amount. But a lot of the other women, and they were mainly Asian women, never used to say anything because they were worried about losing the work. Working in the Low Pay Unit meant that I could help other people."

The Low Pay Unit was where Kuldeep first became interested in trade unions, who were also engaged in trying to support isolated garment industry workers. However it would be another three years before she became a UNISON member.

After completing a degree in therapeutic counselling during her time at the Low Pay Unit, Kuldeep began working at Leeds City Council's social services department in 1993, where she also joined UNISON.

Beginning as a crisis counsellor, Kuldeep offered much needed therapy in Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi and English to women across the region. After 27 years with the council, Kuldeep now works in health and social care commissioning, where she sits on the management boards of a number of social and charitable initiatives.

Kuldeep has also spent nearly three decades as a UNISON activist, predominantly focusing on equalities. Currently she sits on the union's black members committee, as well as the disabled members committee.

She said: "Black staff are still not being given the opportunity to go up the ladder in many careers. If you look at the statistics there's hardly any managers of colour, which is linked to institutionalised racism."

Challenging the systemic and often unrecognised racial discrimination that exists in

workplaces, and in society generally, has always been an uphill struggle for black and ethnic minority individuals and communities. But for Kuldeep the discussions raised by the Black Lives Matter movement offer hope.

"I am optimistic. But it means all of us, and not just people of colour, recognising that we all have a certain amount of prejudice and bias and opening up and talking about it," Kuldeep said.

The other big issue of 2020, the coronavirus, has had an impact that could also see long term improvements in home working for disabled workers, said Kuldeep, who suffers from arthritis and lymphangitis.

"A lot of people with disabilities are finding it really good to work from home. Previously many were told they had to come into the office and were having to use sick leave when equipment to allow them to work wasn't available," explained Kuldeep.

Unfortunately, the virus has postponed Kuldeep's planned adventure to India this year, but during the lockdown she dedicated more time to designing and making outfits for herself and her daughter. □

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Kuldeep makes clothes for herself and her daughter

Photo: Mark Harvey



HEART OF GOLD

Active! reporter **Helen Hague** tells the inspiring story of an ex-goldminer from Ghana who became a clinical support worker at a Sheffield hospital. And now following UNISON's Return to Learn courses*, Vytautas Amponsem is studying at the Open University for a degree in nursing

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I'D BEEN
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FOR QUITE
A WHILE

Vytautas Amponsem knows a thing or two about radical career changes. He used to help blast rocks underground in Ghana's biggest gold mine. Now he helps care for patients at the Royal

Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield.

But there's more in store. He is halfway through the Open University nursing degree he's studying for while working as a clinical support worker at the hospital. In two years, he expects to be a fully qualified

nurse, making the transition from support to a nursing role on the wards.

For Vytautas, who left school in Ghana in the early nineties, UNISON's Return to Learn course played a key role in helping him get back to learning to build his hospital



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career. He saw the course was on offer in Sheffield when he picked up a UNISON leaflet and signed up for weekly sessions in maths, English and computing. He was already a union member, working at the hospital.

It came along at just the right time, says Vytautas. "I'd been away from learning for quite a while. I was keen to progress, but I needed to get my confidence back. I was already in the right field, but I wanted to upgrade myself. It was just what I needed to focus."

DETERMINED

Not that many NHS workers make the transition from support worker to nurse. In fact, some of Vytautas's colleagues thought he was "mad" to attempt to do so – all that increased responsibility for not a lot of pay. But he was quite determined.

To get accepted on the OU nursing course, potential candidates have to have the endorsement and backing of their hospital trust where they work. Sheffield Teaching Hospitals (NHS) Foundation Trust backed Vytautas's application and duly seconded him. Though he's having to bankroll himself after student grants were withdrawn, he sees his student loan as a worthwhile investment, helping him achieve a long-standing ambition.

But then Vytautas, now 49, has never been short of ambition, always keen to take on "any further training required" for jobs he applies for – keen to do what it takes to succeed. "I don't like to see the ceiling above my head. The sky's the limit," he says.

He likes living and working in Sheffield, a city he first

came to fourteen years ago to visit his brother. He had good school results, references and a lot of experience – twelve years working for AngloGold Ashanti mining company in Ghana. But, frustratingly, he found UK employers would not always recognise qualifications gained in Ghana, where he worked as both a 'Blastman' and Instructor.

His jobs at the mine included instructing staff and new trainees in using underground equipment safely as well as placing charges in rocks before other teams moved in to collect the precious ore released by the blast.

Tellingly, he also worked weekends as a stand-by captain for the company rescue team – ready to help if workers got trapped underground in accidents, rockfalls or ceiling collapses before the emergency services arrived. Getting to trapped or injured workers as quickly as possible helps save lives. This is where he first learned first aid skills.

HARD-WIRED

Vytautas has dual heritage: his mother is Lithuanian – google his first name and you learn that Vytautas the Great was ruler of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the fifteenth century, revered as a national hero for centuries.

Vytautas's late Ghanaian father was a doctor – so his son's desire to serve as a licensed clinician could well be hard-wired. He has certainly got the taste for hands-on caring – his hobbies include captaining teams in inter departmental first aid competitions.

Vytautas worked in low

paid low skilled jobs when he first came to live in Sheffield – on production lines, delivering goods plus a couple of months at the Royal Hallamshire working as a cleaner. He then moved on to work at a care home in the city, where he stayed for nearly five years looking after vulnerable and challenging people, rising to the rank of team leader and honing his caring skills.

Then, six years ago, he was back at the Royal Hallamshire, no longer cleaning but working in clinical support, building on the skills he had acquired at the care home where he had assisted nursing staff with basic clinical tasks.

He enjoyed working in the mine back in Ghana but feels far more at home earning his living in a caring role, working for the NHS. The OU model of learning the theory – then putting it into practice on the wards makes lots of sense.

EXPERIENCE

He recently got back in touch with Return to Learn staff member Shirley Allen-Jackson, to tell her about the OU nursing degree. She was quick to email back – telling Vytautas she knew he'd "make a great nurse". She said colleagues and tutors on the course, "just want to celebrate your achievements".

For Vytautas, Return to Learn delivered what its title promised. Speaking from experience he added: "It is great for getting people to where they want to go." Praise indeed from one who is well on the way to getting there. □

**Return to Learn courses are suspended at the moment because of covid-19*



FLIPPANT FASCIST

The cheekie chappie buffoonery of the occupant of Number Ten is driven by a sinister ideology which yearns for the 'great era' of the British Empire. And that includes slavery, says **Peter Carroll**

Does anyone out there seriously think Boris Johnson is funny? I ask because someone recently told me that I had to "admit" he was "hilarious" - whatever I thought about his politics.

I was, and remain, baffled by the fact that there are people in our midst who think he's a master of

comedy.

So when the BBC is reportedly about to purge the airwaves of so-called "left wing comedians", it is a good time to remind ourselves of the wit and wisdom of our side-splitting jester of a Prime Minister.

After all, his racist, homophobic, sexist and anti-working class banter will revive what many thought had died with the TV

demise of Jim Davison et al – the comedy of bigotry.

Here's a few of his greatest quips:

Johnson on gay marriage: "If gay marriage was OK – and I was uncertain on the issue – then I saw no reason in principle why a union should not be consecrated for three men, as well as two men, or indeed, three men and a dog."

Are you warming to this

effortlessly superior Bullingdon Club tone?

Well there's more. Johnson on Islam: "Judged purely on its scripture – to say nothing of what is preached in the mosques – it is the most viciously sectarian of all religions towards unbelievers. Islam is the problem."

Well that one had them rolling about in the nation's flourishing neo-fascist comedy venues.

But more importantly it also presented them with a racist script – a fascist handbook – from the very top of the nation's class and political system.

They have been given the nod from the top man to justify their savagery. The fish always rots from the head down.

And there's more: "It is said that the Queen has come to love the Commonwealth, partly because it supplies her with regular cheering crowds of flag-waving piccaninnies with watermelon smiles."

When challenged about this astonishingly contemptuous and patrician racial slur, Johnson claimed it was taken out of context!

But he's one of those comedians whose buffoonish act is rooted in material driven by a sinister ideology which yearns for the "great era" of the British Empire – slavery and all.

Johnson on slavery: "Colonialism in Africa is not a blot upon our conscience.

"The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more."

If anyone was left in any doubt that Johnson is selective in his cheeky-chappie denigration of

everyone else, read on.

On working class men in the Spectator: "Working class men are likely to be drunk, criminal, aimless, feckless and hopeless."

Well that hilariously gives both barrels to millions of working class men whose lives and families have been devastated by Tory de-industrialisation, savage and targeted welfare cuts and the last ten years of falling wages and social misery caused by wilfully cruel austerity.

But to be fair, he has some equally offensive views on women. He wrote that it was "outrageous" that married couples should pay for the "single mothers' desire to procreate independently of men."

He added that it was "feeble" for a man to be "unable or unwilling to take control of his woman" and that "Britain needed to restore women's desire to be married."

You have to admit that the last quote is a belter, coming as it does from a man of world-beating promiscuity who only acknowledges a certain number of his numerous children by various abandoned women.

When Donald Trump did a mocking imitation of a disabled journalist at one of his televised Hitleresque "Make American Great Again" rallies, people were aghast. He could not, surely, get away with such shocking, childish viciousness. Many commentators felt that that one incident alone would put paid to his immensely corrupt political grand larceny.

But on he goes. It would once have been quite unbelievable that the most

powerful politician in the world could even personally feel such disgusting contempt for disabled people, let alone demonstrate it, just for laughs, at his rallies.

Actually reading what Boris Johnson has written and said raises the same question: How has he got away with it?

The answer is partly the evil genius and lockdown maverick Dominic Cummings.

He has an immensely dangerous, unshakeable belief that weirdos and misfits are the people who can take control of Britain and subjugate all opposition.

Granted, he had to sack one of his latest recruits for publicly advocating that the police use live rounds on Black Lives Matters protesters – or any other anti-government activists further down the line.

But he didn't really want to, it's just that the time is not quite right for full-blown autocratic and anti-democratic state repression. Not just now, but definitely sometime soon.

The growth of fascism is being driven by greedy, heartless men and their billionaire masters here and in the US.

Europe is equally blighted by the promotion of this far-right ideology, even though the mind-boggling crimes of the Nazis are thoroughly documented and widely known throughout the world.

We are living through a renaissance of fascism and its racist agenda, embodied by silly old Boris and his deranged mentor across the water. There's nothing to laugh at about this, nothing at all. □



WORKING CLASS MEN ARE LIKELY TO BE DRUNK, CRIMINAL, AIMLESS, FECKLESS AND HOPELESS
Boris Johnson



BRITAIN NEEDED TO RESTORE WOMEN'S DESIRE TO BE MARRIED
Boris Johnson



PAUL ROUTLEDGE

MIRROR POLITICAL COLUMNIST

SINGING IN UNISON FOR OUR NHS

Airedale General's choir sang the Bill Withers' classic 'Lean on Me' to celebrate the 100th birthday of fund-raising hero Captain Sir Tom Moore. It also sent out the strong message that the NHS is 'here for you' and that public support is essential to its future

We had it bad here, and no mistake. The NHS, social care and all our other public services were stretched to the limit – and beyond. Covid-19 struck with merciless strength in Yorkshire's cities and the old textile towns like Dewsbury and Batley.

Bradford suffered worst, with Sheffield, Leeds, Rotherham, Barnsley, Hull and Doncaster hit badly by the viral Blitz. At the time of writing, there have been 32,273 confirmed cases of coronavirus in the county, and 2,580 deaths – every one a personal tragedy for family and friends.

My local hospital, Airedale General, has a huge catchment area extending over the border into Lancashire, and so has been through tough times. I suppose it was no different from elsewhere, but staff had to adapt quickly to a fast-moving situation, despite personal anxieties for themselves, family and friends. Support was put in place, including "wobble rooms" where people could take time out, have a breather and then return to the fray.

"There is a hefty dose of Yorkshire pragmatism in there," one staffer told me. "We know what we have to do to

keep our communities safe, and we do it with a minimum of fuss. Winter now looms, so priority alongside caring for patients and planning for potential surges is our own resilience and wellbeing."

At the height of the crisis, 70 patients were being cared for in "hot" wards, but as autumn neared this figure dropped to a handful. More than 200 patients who had tested positive for Covid-19 were discharged; 110 sadly died. But there is an upside to the tragedy.

I attended a Thursday night "NHS Clap" there in late April. There was an impressive turnout of staff, emergency workers and local people, including relatives of Captain Sir Tom Moore, the fund-raising hero.

He's a local boy from Keighley, a working-class town with few pretensions but a big heart. A blue plaque honouring his £30 million fund-raising for NHS causes has been unveiled at the hospital. His efforts "raised the spirits of the world" during the pandemic, it says.

On Captain Tom's 100th birthday, Airedale's hospital choir, made up of clinical staff, nurses, technicians, cleaners and support services recorded a video of the Bill Withers classic Lean On Me. Choir leader Steph

Burgess, a speech and language therapist, says: "One of the best things about working for the NHS is the sense of community and togetherness, and Airedale has that in spades.

"Through the choir, I wanted to put out a message that the NHS is here for you, and will support you as always, but particularly while things are so difficult for so many people at the moment. The lyrics of Lean On Me express that sentiment perfectly, as well as the idea that we in the NHS also need the support of others."

Amen to that. The video went out on YouTube, so look out for it!

TETLEY TRANCE

The Aire riverfront in Leeds once occupied by Tetley's brewery is being redeveloped with flats, hotels, shopping and an office tower.

It will also have an open space modelled on Millennium Square, and named the Tetley Triangle. Funny, I thought there was one already. I've been lost in it often enough.

SILENT ROAR

I didn't foresee the coronavirus crisis coming (and nor did anybody else, alas) but I did get one thing right in the last Active!

“ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT WORKING FOR THE NHS IS THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY



Leeds United are back in the Premier League where they belong, after sixteen years. I'm not football crazy, but I do understand what that feels like for fans and the wider population of the city. It's a matter of pride and commitment.

Under coach Marcelo 'El Loco' Bielsa, the future for LUFC looks bright, and it brings them back into contention with Sheffield United, four years a Premier side.

Harrogate Town is now in the football league for the first time, bringing to twelve the number of teams in the county. Fourteen in UNISON's region, if you count Grimsby and Scunthorpe.

The only thing missing now is the sight and sound of supporters in the stand.

IT'S UP TO YOU

The election for a new UNISON general secretary to succeed Dave Prentis is under way. It's for members to choose their leader, so I won't seek to intervene.

Except to say this: I would ignore any endorsement of any candidate from current or past leaders of the Labour Party. It is for UNISON to influence the direction of politics, not the other way round.

LOAD OF PFEFFEL

Top civil servants are looking at how much the sale of their homes in London could buy them in a posh bit of Yorkshire.

A terraced house in East Dulwich could fetch enough to own a substantial Edwardian villa in Harrogate, they think.

Why the sudden desire to move to God's Own County? It's possible

some departments might be exiled to the North.

York could become a regional hub of government – but not the new home for the House of Lords. That idea has been shot down in flames.

I'll believe this latest bid to decant Whitehall to the white walls of York when I see it. It's supposedly part of the Tory "levelling up" agenda to reduce regional inequalities.

This is Boris's big idea, and it's as credible as David Cameron's Big Society.

£3000 AN HOUR!

Nice shirk, if you can get it. My MP for Skipton and Ripon, Tory Julian Smith, sacked from his Northern Ireland Secretary job, lost no time in finding lucrative "employment" outside Parliament.

He's being paid three grand an hour by chemicals firm Rye Hydrogen Ltd.

The Commons Register of Members' Financial Interests shows he trousered £15,000 plus VAT for five hours' work in July.

The register says Smith, who admits to being drunk when Boris gave him his first Cabinet post, is expected to work 20 hours for the firm over the next year. For that, he gets £50,000 plus VAT.

Jo Bamford, chief executive of Rye Hydrogen, also owns Wrightbus, a Northern Ireland bus company urging government funding for a fleet of hydrogen-powered buses.

Smith's appointment was cleared by the Government's Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, chaired by Keighley-born Tory peer (and former MP and sacker in chief as leader of Bradford City Council) Lord Pickles.

Pickles ruled that the risk of Smith being offered the job based on any decisions he had made in government was "low" because any public funding for hydrogen-powered vehicles would not have been in his ministerial portfolio.

But just to keep things straight, Milord Pickles advised Smith not to give advice on any bidding for government money. So that makes everything alright, then. If you think so. Which I don't.

DUE CREDIT

Well over half a million old folk over the age of 75 eligible to retain their free TV licences will miss out because they don't claim pension credit.

Some 55,568 of them live in Yorkshire and Humberside, according to figures obtained by Turn2Us.

The anti-poverty charity's Anna Stevenson says: "Pension credit is a lifeline for older people on low incomes in retirement. Now it is the only route to getting a free TV licence, so it's more important than ever to claim it."

Labour peer Lord Foulkes, chair of the all-party Parliamentary group on the elderly, admits that take-up of the benefit "still remains poor."

"This is because of various factors – pride, which means many old people don't like to seek 'charity', as well as the over-complicated forms and bureaucracy which is intimidating for those who need this support the most."

If a member of your family, or someone you know, is one of those 55,568 who probably qualify for pension credit – and a free TV licence – do help them to claim. They've paid for it with a lifetime of taxes. □



YOUR COVID RIGHTS

Gerrard Stilliard, Thompsons Solicitors' head of personal injury strategy, says employers have a legal duty to abide by regulations and guidance aimed at protecting workers during the pandemic

Throughout the covid-19 pandemic, one of the biggest concerns has been about the safety of frontline staff and key workers.

Clearly those involved in the medical response, such as nurses, paramedics, care workers, blue light personnel and support staff such as cleaners were especially vulnerable. However other essential service providers, including teachers and key workers are all undoubtedly at greater risk of contracting the illness than the rest of us. And they were all working under even greater pressure than normal.

The most obvious risk has been a lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). For healthcare workers, adequate PPE in all close patient contact settings includes gloves, surgical face masks, plastic overshoes, eyewear, and full-length protective gowns.

When working in higher-risk acute areas, including when carrying out aerosol generating procedures, more equipment may be necessary, including FFP3 respirators.

There were significant concerns during March and April that the healthcare sector was woefully underprepared for this pandemic, with the British Medical Association reporting on how doctors had been "forced into impossible situations as NHS staff report

dangerously low levels of PPE".

Unfortunately in the private sector, there have always been employers who put profit before employee safety; not even a global pandemic changes that. However all employers have a legal duty to provide a safe workplace, and because of the pandemic new safety guidelines were introduced, with expectations on employers to:

- Carry out a detailed Covid-19 risk assessment
- Arrange work processes to protect employees
- Provide adequate handwashing facilities
- Provide PPE
- Establish social distancing measures
- Establish cleaning measures

If your employer's failure to comply with regulations - or official guidance - has caused you to contract COVID-19, you may be eligible to make a claim for compensation.

These claims are not going to be straight forward, as the claimant needs to prove exposure came from the workplace rather than elsewhere. If, for instance, you're a nurse who has contracted the condition after working in a ward with patients suffering from the virus, employers may seek to suggest that the infection could equally have come from your local supermarket, from a relative, or the bus you took to go home. There may well be arguments over the adequacy of the PPE provided and employers

may say they complied with government guidance.

Rest-assured that for the nearly 100 years Thompsons Solicitors has been fighting employers in personal injury claims, we have only ever worked for the injured party, never for employers or insurance companies. Tricky cases have never put us off but made us more determined.

This is why, in conjunction with UNISON, we have developed the "Workplace Exposure COVID-19 Questionnaire", which aims to help establish where members have been exposed to COVID-19 and how their employers responded.

A team of workplace personal injury experts at Thompsons will analyse the completed questionnaires and explore every avenue to provide the best legal support for those who have become ill or lost a loved one due to COVID-19. Every completed questionnaire will also provide information to help us get a fuller picture of life on the front line, identify possible witnesses and provide information that can be used to campaign about the issues raised. □

***Your first port of call should be your UNISON rep or your branch. For more information visit www.thompsonstradeunion.law/ unison or get in touch on 0808 252 2783.**



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Gerrard Stilliard

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