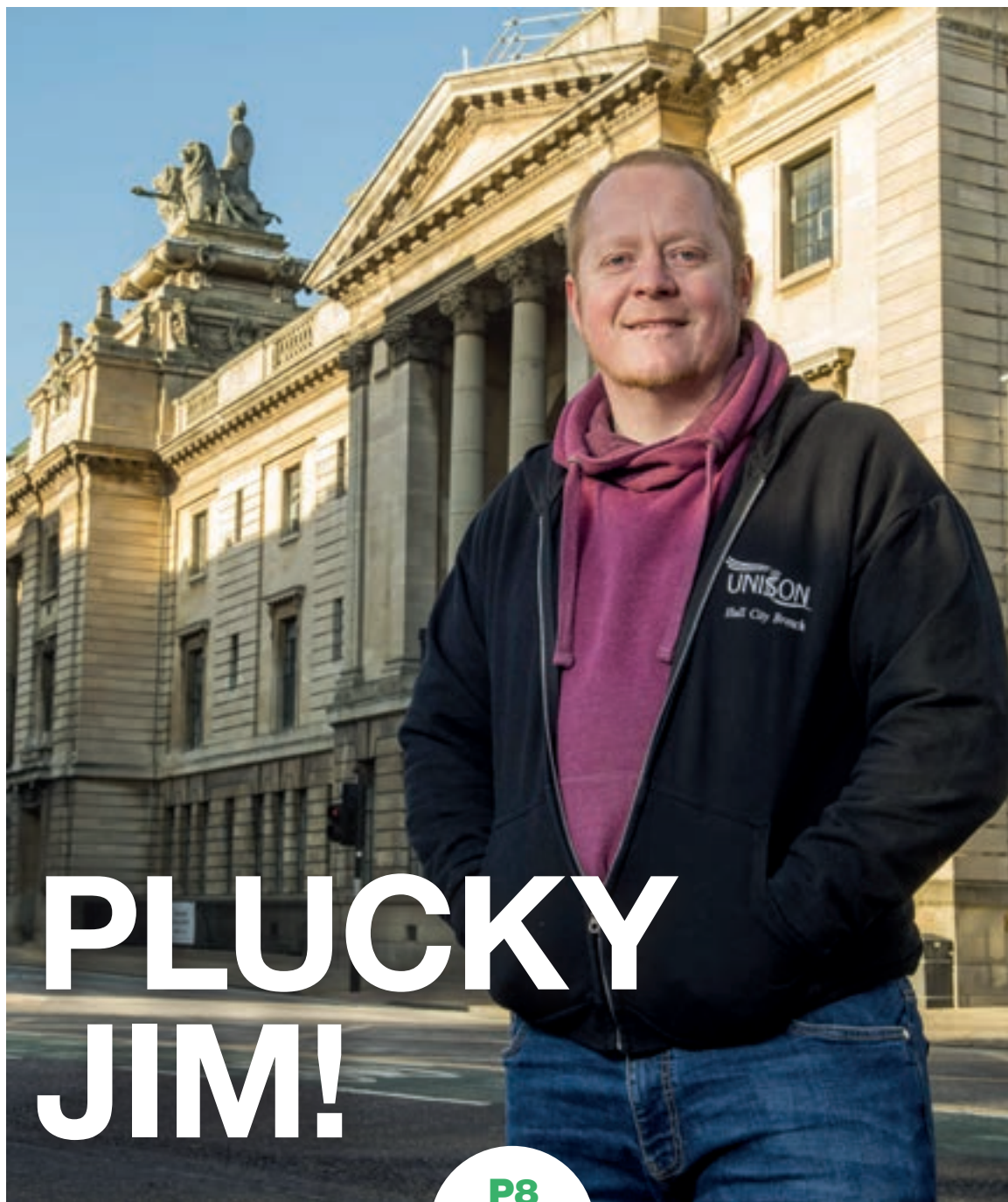


ACTIVE!



MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS IN YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE
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PLUCKY JIM!

P8

JAMES ROBINSON'S COUNCIL PAY VICTORY

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THIS CAN'T GO ON

As if you hadn't enough to deal with. You've kept going during the pandemic, putting yourselves in harm's way to save lives and care for others, going the extra mile in schools and hospitals, making sure we have heating, lighting and water and keeping local services going. You've been amazing. You've done all this, yet the rewards have never been great, particularly over the past 10 years of pay freezes and squeezes. And now a cost of living crisis hits us, inevitably made worse by the economic impact of Putin's despicable invasion of Ukraine.

Many of you, in Yorkshire & Humberside, already worried about household bills, will be wondering how you're going to make ends meet. You face a triple whammy of a national insurance surcharge,

a massive 54 per cent increase in the energy price cap and rising interest rates. And now the governor of the Bank of England is calling for pay restraint. As usual, it will be public service workers, who will take the hit.

But holding down wages won't stop the cost of living soaring. Staff who are struggling to keep their families warm and fed are already leaving the NHS and other public services in their droves.

This can't go on. The Government must act now to curb rampant price rises and put cash into public services and the pockets of the people who deliver them. I am leading UNISON's work to get this message to ministers. Working together with sister unions, we can make sure our voice is heard.



**CHRISTINA
MCANEAN
GENERAL
SECRETARY**

Christina McAnea

WE'RE THE TARGET

Leopards don't change their spots, they say, and neither do Tory governments.

For months we have all witnessed the blatant attempts to divert the public's attention from the scandalous flouting of lockdown rules in Downing Street.

The prime minister's pre-invasion diplomatic trip to the Ukraine, we are told, was designed to protect Britain from the might of the vast Russian army (who really have got weapons of mass destruction).

Openly ridiculed by overseas media for the great cake ambush excuse, and all the other lies he has spouted, Boris Johnson's intervention was absurd – just a crude attempt to distract attention from the chaos of the Tories' misrule.

They have hypocritically sung the praises of our public sector

staff to the rhythm of clashing pots and pans, only to inflict yet another real-terms pay cut for our members.

Then there's the great "levelling up" rhetoric, to distract us all and give comfort to the so-called red wall MPs who know they will lose their jobs in a general election as the effects of austerity, soaring prices and cuts to wages and benefits punish the majority of people in this country.

UNISON will continue to fight for justice for our members as Johnson's utterly discredited regime disintegrates before our very eyes.

Our members – and millions of other beleaguered workers – deserve better than this.



**WENDY
NICHOLS
REGIONAL
CONVENOR**

W. Nichols

UNIVERSITY STAFF IN PAY STRIKE

UNISON members went on strike at Leeds University between February 28 and March 2 to fight for a pay rise as the cost of living soars.

Angela Blackburn, UNISON branch secretary at the university, said dedicated staff were having to choose between heating and eating because their pay had fallen so far behind the cost of living.

Angela said the financial hardship had inevitably caused mental health

problems among members. "In the last ten years the pay of the average employee in higher education has fallen against inflation between 17 and 20 per cent," she said.

"In effect our members are working more than two months of the year for nothing, against where they were 10 years ago. This is not a sustainable situation. Staff across the country are having to use foodbanks and claim benefits"

Angela pointed out that a 1.5 per cent pay rise was imposed in August by Universities UK, the negotiating body, since when inflation had rocketed to more than 6 per cent.

"The national insurance rise in April and the massive rises in utility, food and fuel prices will be catastrophic for our members and the strike shows how deeply worried and angry our members are."

£20 UPLIFT WAS A 'LIFELINE'

UNISON women's conference condemned the removal of the £20 a week pandemic-related uplift to Universal Credit in a motion tabled by the union's Yorkshire and Humberside region.

Representing the women's self-organised group in the region, Lauramay Beynon (below), said: "£20 may not seem a lot to some, but how about £100 a month or £1200 a year? This starts to be a more significant amount of money. If you're lucky

enough for £1200 to be a drop in the ocean, you're very fortunate, but for far too many women in receipt of the Universal Credit uplift, this is the lifeline they need to feed the family and themselves, to keep them warm, to buy fuel to get to their job."

Lauramay pointed out that these low-paid women were suffering mentally and financially and there was worse to come with inflation forecast to increase to 7.5 per cent in April.

The resolution called for a broad-based campaign throughout the labour movement and in Parliament to highlight the plight of women, who are disproportionately represented among Universal Credit claimants

It instructed UNISON's national women's committee to produce information on sources of help for women with financial difficulties, such as the union's There For You service and regional debt and money advice services.



MINISTERS MUST FLASH THE CASH

Regional convenor Wendy Nichols urged ministers to “put their money where their mouth is” over their levelling up policies.

Speaking to consulting editor Mary Maguire, Wendy (pictured right) said: “The pledges are long overdue, but we don’t want paper promises; we want funding to match the grand vision.

“Over the past 11 years the Tories have cut public spending – government funding for local councils has dropped by more than half. Local services have been ruined by government policy, leading to a decline in local economies. And our members will want to know how their pay is going to be levelled-up.”

Wendy said the Government’s recently published White Paper, Levelling Up the United Kingdom, was “awash with promises” to deliver 12 “missions” to shift focus and resources to Britain’s forgotten communities. The 300-page document

was full of data illustrating the economic, health and life-expectancy differences between regions.

She pointed out that the promises for Yorkshire & Humberside included previous spending commitments: the new UK infrastructure bank based in Leeds; a better bus service across West Yorkshire; a supertram in South Yorkshire; investment in cities and towns; better broadband and more civil servants to move to cities in the region.

But she asked: “Is there new money or merely previously announced or recycled cash?” She added: “There are few commitments above the 2021 spending review that itself failed to offer anywhere near enough to compensate for the past decade of cuts.

“There is even a proposal in the White Paper that 5 per cent of the local government pension scheme should be allocated locally, which

would unlock £16bn in new investment.”

Wendy pointed out that the politically unaligned Institute for Fiscal Studies argued that the targets were “highly unlikely to be met... ambition and resource will be spread very thin”.

Wendy said: “Of course we want to see our region thriving, with better jobs, educational opportunities, health care and increased life expectancy. UNISON has always campaigned for high quality services and supported decision-making being in the hands of local communities. But quite frankly we are sceptical that the Government will put its money where its mouth is.”



ODDS-ON?

THE REGION HOPES TO RUN ITS ANNUAL EVENT AT DONCASTER RACES THIS SUMMER, BUT WILL ONLY DO SO IF IT IS SAFE.

Meanwhile please keep the date in your diary - Saturday July 30, 2022. Details of how and when to purchase tickets will be posted on the regional website <https://yorks.unison.org.uk/>

UNISON
Yorkshire and
Humberside





PARTY? WHAT PARTY?

It was party-time for the media as bare-faced Boris denied the undeniable, says consulting editor **Mary Maguire**

It was an early Christmas gift to editors of epic proportions. The gift that kept on giving, with more twists and turns than a mountain road. Hashtag partygate. The highly believable accusation that the Prime Minister had attended boozy parties during lockdown, but thought he was at work.

When challenged, his first instinct was to deny everything. According to the *Mirror*, he said: "All the guidance was followed completely." To the BBC: "All the guidelines were observed." To ITV news, after a video of his communications director emerged giving the story legs: "I am sickened and furious about that – but I have been repeatedly assured that there was no party and that no covid rules were broken." To Sky and a myriad of media, he said: "I certainly broke no rules."

When his ruse of hiding in the back seat of his official Range Rover was uncovered and splashed across the front pages, he then tried to disguise himself as a jogger. When that, too, failed, he fled to a hospital in north London where he thought people wouldn't recognise him in his PM of UK monogrammed PP3 protective face mask, provided by a grateful private contractor.

In hot pursuit, the fourth estate's finest snappers and moving picture crews, did their bit to inform an enraged public of the hapless rule-breaker. Cornered, and asked about the bring your own booze party, Johnson whinged: "Nobody told me that what we were doing was against the rules."

Every media outlet sent out their finest to unearth further evidence of more parties. Pages and pages of emotional interviews with people who had stuck to the rules, while their loved ones lay sick or dying, were published. Revenge

was certainly best served cold for Johnson's former aide Dominic Cummings, who stuck the knife in to accuse him of lying. To deflect the whole media circus, a fact-finding inquiry by a very senior civil servant, Sue Gray, was instigated. But the story still refused to budge.

The *Yorkshire Post* outed Sheffield city council's new chief, Kate Josephs, for holding her lockdown leaving do in the cabinet office in Whitehall when she left her job as director general of the national Covid task force.

And then a video appeared on twitter featuring a Line of Duty probe into Johnson, in which he is told: "You believe you're above the law. Well fella – the party's over. Mother of God you must think we were born yesterday. Your corruption was mistaken for incompetence".

Johnson wheeled out his ministers to do the media rounds, programmed robot-like to repeat ad nauseum: take everything seriously, followed the rules, Sue Gray, vaccine roll-out, booster programme, implicitly not complicit.

In a desperate attempt to draw attention away from partygate, Grant Shapps was ordered to get himself filmed on a train ordering train companies to desist from "irritating" announcements. There will be a "bonfire of the banalities", he confidently predicted.

As would-be assassins on the Tory backbench circled their prey, police were called in to investigate the unlikely spectacle of Frank Spencer clone, Gavin Williamson, for bullying them. As the *i* reported: "Prime Minister's position precarious. Conservative rebels regroup ahead of Gray report. Cabinet minister says Johnson faces 'death by a thousand cuts' on the grounds that it's 'always unlikely you shoot and take him out in one round'. Brutal. Time will tell. □



NOBODY
TOLD ME
IT WAS
AGAINST
THE
RULES

- Boris Johnson



Mary Maguire



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- Debt advice
- Wellbeing breaks
- Support & information

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- ☑ Calling us on 020 7121 5620

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information by visiting our website

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

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the public service union

Photo: Hull News & Pictures



SOLIDARITY PAYS

Hull council staff contacted UNISON rep James Robinson when they found their wages didn't match their new responsibilities. James tells **Bryan Patrick** how they won up to £3000 a year extra

The tenancy officers at Hull City Council were fed up. Their job had always been challenging, but after years of cuts to local authority funding the role had expanded – the problem was their pay hadn't.

The workers went to UNISON rep James Robinson and together they not only achieved a massive pay victory for nearly 100 workers, but changed the council's entire pay grade evaluation system for the better.

The main job of a tenancy officer is to ensure council house tenants are looking after their property and paying their rent.

In reality, however, much of their time is spent dealing with and assisting vulnerable tenants, including those with mental illness, drug and alcohol issues and hoarders.

Years of austerity, impacting services and staff numbers, coupled with growing inequality and worsening poverty rates, meant Hull's tenancy officers were expected to take on more and more responsibilities.

James, 35, who has been a UNISON rep for 10 years, said: "The tenancy officers came to me in 2019 and said, 'can we have a regrade because our job description does not reflect our role?' But then Covid hit and so we agreed to come back to it at a more suitable time.

"About a year later, we finally got moving again and got a new job description written up – there was a lot of stuff that got changed significantly. It was then that struggle began to get the pay grade increased."

The new job description was submitted to the council leadership but came back as a grade six – the same grade tenancy officers were already on.

James knew Hull City

Council's pay review system wasn't fit for purpose, describing the process as 'secret', and lodged an appeal, which took place in August this year.

"As the weeks went on, I started reading the National Joint Council technical notices, the guidance around how the pay review process should be carried out, and realised the council wasn't following agreed procedure," James said.

"So, on top of the appeal, we raised a collective grievance over national and council policies not being followed. We also told staff to work to their old job description, which was about ten years out of date."

After sticking to their guns, holding a rally outside the council offices, and then sitting down for more negotiations, in November the council upheld the grievance and upgraded tenancy officers from a grade six to a grade seven.

It was an outstanding result, that saw pay increase by up to £3,000 a year, with some workers also receiving around nearly £6,000 in back pay.

Significantly, the council, which employs 5,000 people, agreed to reform its entire pay grade policy to meet national guidance. Training is also to be provided for UNISON reps to enable them to take part in future pay review panels.

UNISON regional organiser for local government, Sarah Keig, said: "James really went for it. He learnt all about the job evaluation scheme off his own back. He helped the tenancy officers put the case together and led on it on behalf of the branch.

"Tenancy officer membership increased by about 10 per cent and we have seen an increase in membership in other areas as a direct result.

"James was also able to mentor three of the tenancy

officers and they're now considering being stewards. They've been key to this as well. The four of them kept the momentum going because it was a very long process because of the pandemic."

Outside of work, James loves 'all sports' but particularly enjoys following his favourite rugby club Hull FC. He also enjoys sampling Hull's wide range of restaurants with his family, who he spends a lot of time with.

"We go out and eat a lot, that's probably my biggest hobby – supporting Hull businesses by eating at them," James laughed.

"You can get every sort of cuisine now. Maybe ten years ago, it seemed like pubs and bars were the main thing in Hull, whereas now there's a lot more of a restaurant and café vibe – the culture isn't so centred around drinking now."

There's also been a culture change in the way Hull City Council conducts pay grading assessments, thanks in no little part to James.

This said, James is clear that the strength of the union is based on collective action and is quick to praise his colleagues.

He said: "It's about empowering people, rather than trying to do it all by yourself. It was clear after the pay grade was changed that our members didn't feel recognised by the management – they felt recognised by the union.

"Members knew that they wouldn't have achieved this without being in a union. Solidarity was a big aspect of this win.

"When it came to working to their old job description the reaction from the council was unpleasant and they came under a lot of pressure. But they all stuck together and that's what took it over the line." □



MEMBERS
KNEW
THEY
WOULDN'T
HAVE
ACHIEVED
THIS
WITHOUT
BEING
IN A
UNION

IT'S INFLATION, STUPID!

Boris 'The Liar' Johnson is trying to metamorphose from party animal to international statesman dealing with the Ukraine war. But the defining issue will be the economy, says Mirror political commentator **Paul Routledge**

There is a cynical adage in politics: "Never let a good crisis go to waste." It worked for Maggie Thatcher in 1983, when the Falklands War saved her from probable defeat at the polls. Boris Johnson clearly has this in mind as he seeks to metamorphose from Mr Partygate to international statesman.

It might work, but there are obvious dissimilarities as well as parallels. Horrendous as events are in the Ukraine, and likely to get worse, it is not UK, or even Nato territory and there are no British boots on the ground.

Public opinion could swing towards the government of the day, as it usually does in a crisis of this nature, but death and destruction in Kyiv may not prove the old saying correct this time.

In the only test of political mood since the Russian invasion, the by-election in Birmingham Erdington, Labour easily retained the seat with an increased share of the vote, sending the city's first black woman MP, ex-NHS nurse Paulette Hamilton, to Westminster.

Party leader Sir Keir Starmer hailed her victory as a sign that voters in the so-called Red Wall seats in Yorkshire

and the North East, lost to the Conservatives in 2019, are returning to the fold.

At the outbreak of hostilities in Eastern Europe Labour still had a five-point lead in the polls, and with Starmer steadfastly supporting government policy on Ukraine, there is less opportunity for Johnson to deny him political space.

And make no mistake about it, there has been a bitter internal conflict in the Tory Party which presents united Labour with a massive political opportunity.

The council elections in May should consolidate the people's party as a genuine alternative government to the shambles that has disgraced Westminster for the past two and a half years.

Publishing schedules mean I have to write before the outcome of the Met police inquiry into Partygate, and the publication of mandarin Sue Gray's final report into the conduct of the Prime Minister.

But we know how Johnson will handle the last act of this political drama. If he doesn't get a fixed penalty notice, he'll say he's been cleared by the police. If he does, he'll dismiss the punishment as nothing more than a parking fine.

It might not be a winner this

time. Even if he survives a vote of confidence, which is not a foregone conclusion, he is mortally wounded.

However Partygate is not, in the end, the issue that will determine the next election.

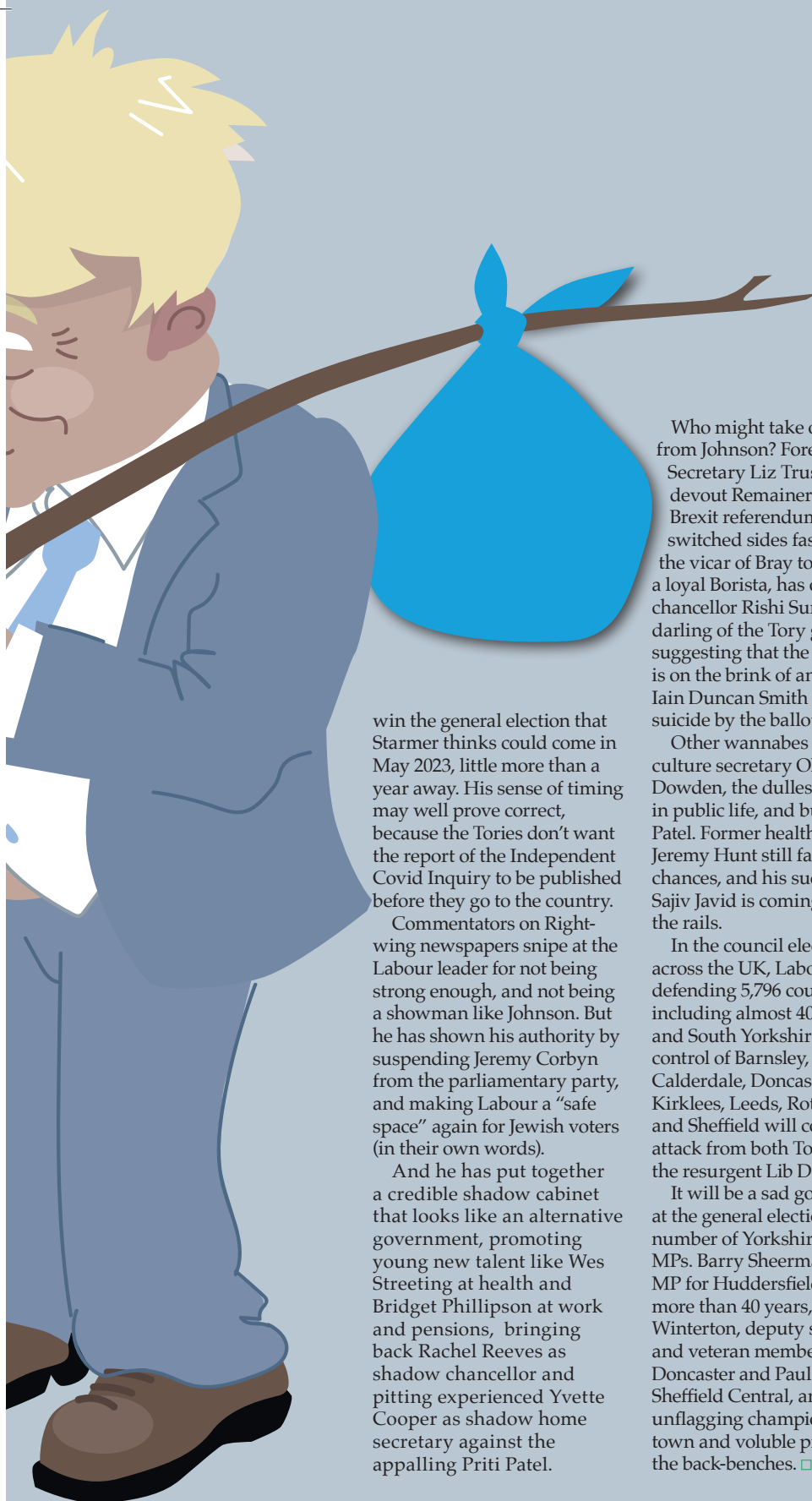
True, the public's total lack of trust in a lying Prime Minister will play a part. But the defining issue will still be "the economy, stupid" as Bill Clinton crudely put it.

The outcome will hinge on the ferocious surge in the cost of living, with rocketing prices of everything from bread to petrol, gas and electricity to beer and cars to clothing; coupled with the hike in taxes on wages and rising interest rates. The war in Ukraine will make matters considerably worse, with some economists predicting an inflation rate of 10 per cent. That, in my view, will do for the Tories.

Voters in the Red Wall Labour seats are disenchanted. In a recent opinion poll, they gave Sir Keir a clear 15-point lead over Johnson. 49 per cent said they intend to return to the Labour fold, against 33 per cent who will stick with the Conservatives.

Polls are a useful political tool, but they are not Holy Writ. Labour still has a mountain to climb if it is to





THE OUTCOME WILL HINGE ON THE FEROCIOUS SURGE IN THE COST OF LIVING

win the general election that Starmer thinks could come in May 2023, little more than a year away. His sense of timing may well prove correct, because the Tories don't want the report of the Independent Covid Inquiry to be published before they go to the country.

Commentators on Right-wing newspapers snipe at the Labour leader for not being strong enough, and not being a showman like Johnson. But he has shown his authority by suspending Jeremy Corbyn from the parliamentary party, and making Labour a "safe space" again for Jewish voters (in their own words).

And he has put together a credible shadow cabinet that looks like an alternative government, promoting young new talent like Wes Streeting at health and Bridget Phillipson at work and pensions, bringing back Rachel Reeves as shadow chancellor and pitting experienced Yvette Cooper as shadow home secretary against the appalling Priti Patel.

Who might take over from Johnson? Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, a devout Remainer in the Brexit referendum who switched sides faster than the vicar of Bray to become a loyal Borista, has overtaken chancellor Rishi Sunak as the darling of the Tory grassroots, suggesting that the party is on the brink of another Iain Duncan Smith moment: suicide by the ballot box.

Other wannabes include culture secretary Oliver Dowden, the dullest man in public life, and bully-girl Patel. Former health secretary Jeremy Hunt still fancies his chances, and his successor Sajiv Javid is coming up on the rails.

In the council elections across the UK, Labour is defending 5,796 council seats, including almost 400 in West and South Yorkshire. Labour control of Barnsley, Bradford, Calderdale, Doncaster, Hull, Kirklees, Leeds, Rotherham and Sheffield will come under attack from both Tories and the resurgent Lib Dems.

It will be a sad goodbye at the general election to a number of Yorkshire Labour MPs. Barry Sheerman, 81, MP for Huddersfield for more than 40 years, Rosie Winterton, deputy speaker and veteran member for Doncaster and Paul Blomfield, Sheffield Central, an unflinching champion of the town and voluble presence on the back-benches. □



ELECTRIC SHOCK

Journalist **Peter Lazenby** was in Calderdale hospital after a heart attack and was shocked by the degree to which the NHS has changed compared with the health service of the 1960s known by his father, a psychiatric nurse. Peter was also amazed by the rates charged by private company bosses



THERE WERE STORIES OF £80 FEES TO CHANGE A LIGHT BULB

My father worked for three decades as a nurse at High Royds psychiatric hospital at Menston, outside Leeds.

High Royds opened in 1888 as the West Riding Paupers' Lunatic Asylum.

By the 1960s it had changed dramatically of course. Nevertheless it was Victorian, outdated, and huge. Some patients were institutionalised, having been kept there for most of their lives.

On the positive side, it was set in its own extensive grounds with woodlands and fields.

I know a bit about it because my father took me there occasionally as a teenager to learn about his work.

He was a member of the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE), one of the public sector unions which merged with NUPE and NALGO to create UNISON in 1993.

Another positive aspect of High Royds was that it had

its own works department with electricians, plumbers, plasterers, joiners, roofers, bricklayers, gardeners, painters and decorators. If a repair needed doing a skilled worker was available on site, minutes away.

It even had its own market gardens providing some of its fresh food. The flowers which were placed on the wards every week were from its own grounds.

The works department staff were directly employed by the NHS. They were paid union rates negotiated nationally



Peter Lazenby: 20 per cent of NHS privatised

and annually by their unions.

And of course the cleaners, porters, cooks and other staff were NHS employees.

High Royds was closed in 2003. Despite its wonderful setting, it was not suitable for modern psychiatric treatment, and the grounds are now occupied by an upmarket housing estate.

I'm writing this not for reasons of nostalgia, but to make a contrast with today's NHS.

Last year I had a heart attack. I was treated at the wonderful Calderdale Royal Hospital in Halifax near my home in Todmorden in West Yorkshire.

I was in the cardiac unit for six days recuperating from an operation.

I didn't feel unwell and my "reporter mode" kicked in, talking to staff about their work and taking notes - cleaners, catering workers, porters, nurses.

The only directly-employed NHS staff still working in Calder Royal - at least on the wards - were the nurses and doctors.

All the others - cleaners, catering workers, porters - were as dedicated as their colleagues directly employed by the NHS, but were employed by private firms whose first priority is profit.

I'd been wheeled into the ward by a porter whose

tunic was emblazoned with the letters ISS. The catering staff and cleaners were the same, "ISS."

ISS is a multi-national "service provider" with 400,000 employees and multi-million-pound profits, garnered from public service organisations such as our own NHS.

A faulty socket on the ward had to be repaired. Two electricians arrived in a huge truck which seemed to be carrying enough equipment to rewire every hospital in Yorkshire.

The electricians were from a huge contracting firm, Engie. Engie is a French multi-national utility company, also deriving some of its multi-million-pound profits from our NHS.

It took the Engie electricians an hour to work out what circuit they should isolate to fix the socket. It wasn't their fault. Unlike formerly directly-employed NHS workers, they had little knowledge of Calder Royal, let alone the ward.

I don't know how much it cost the NHS to fix that socket - two electricians, the huge truck, coming from I don't know where, but one story I was told in Calder Royal was a shocker.

A hospital worker told me that a while ago an extra electric socket had had to be installed in another ward. She said the contracting firm charged £2,000 to put in the socket. That didn't go to the electricians of course. It contributed to the profits of the contractor, whichever it was, who sent the workers to do the job.

There were stories of £80 call-out fees to change a light bulb, told to me earlier

by a former administrator who resigned in disgust at the rip-offs.

I talked to cleaning and catering workers about their wages. All new employees were paid a lower rate than those of existing staff - in other words a systematic driving down of wages to increase profits. The privateers exploit their own employees, as well as bleeding funds from our NHS.

The stories of the leeching of funds from the NHS to boost private profits seemed endless - and it's Government policy.

This may be common knowledge to NHS staff and workers exploited by the privateers. Some of us, the patients, might also know that we're slowly losing our NHS to the private sector, but actually seeing how it looks first-hand is eye-opening - the minutiae of how billions of pounds are flowing from our NHS to boost private firms' profits.

Here's one final example. Calderdale and Kirklees NHS Trust is having to fork out £773 million to repay the £64 million it actually cost to build Calderdale Royal. Most of it is interest payments.

It's all drastically wrong, immoral. It's the creeping destruction of our NHS.

So far roughly 20 per cent of the NHS has been privatised but the rate is accelerating.

But it's not too late to stop it.

We all need to spread the word. Unions and campaigning organisations are fighting privatisation and exposing the truth. Your union UNISON is prominent among them.

Join the battle. □

Peter Lazenby is the Morning Star northern reporter and a former Yorkshire Evening Post journalist



THE FIRM
CHARGED
£2,000
TO PUT
IN THE
ELECTRIC
SOCKET

TICKING TIME BOMB

Death rates from exposure to asbestos in Yorkshire and Humberside remain stubbornly high, affecting a wide range of people from engineering and construction workers, to health and education staff. But **Marion Voss**, a specialist lawyer at Thompsons Solicitors' Leeds office, says with persistent detective work, the most difficult claims can be successful – even where diagnosis only emerges after death

When a former Rotherham steelworker Derek died in 2018, his wife Margaret was shocked to discover the cause was asbestosis.

Derek – his surname is not being disclosed - had been in serious ill-health

before he died and had dementia. His family had limited information about the nature of his condition caused by asbestos exposure.

Derek's grieving wife Margaret, a UNISON member, found herself having to come to terms with the fact that her

husband's death could have been avoided. With no clear understanding of how, where or when he may have been exposed to the dangerous substance, Margaret turned to UNISON for help and to Thompsons' asbestos disease specialists.

Asbestos was made illegal



Marion Voss

ASBESTOS REMAINS IN SOME OF BRITAIN'S PUBLIC BUILDINGS, SCHOOLS, OFFICES, FACTORIES, AND HOMES

someone who thinks they've been exposed to asbestos, at work or elsewhere, to get legal advice immediately because a statement from them in person is the best evidence in any compensation claim.

That's not always possible, though. Fortunately, as specialist asbestos solicitors, we know how and where to dig to try to find the information we need.

We discovered Derek had reported asbestos exposure to his GP years previously. His work history was recorded in those medical notes.

We tracked down some of Derek's former work colleagues, who confirmed he was exposed to substantial levels of the substance while working at a steelworks between 1963 and 1981. With a little more detective work, we traced other potential witnesses.

Eventually, armed with overwhelming evidence, Margaret was able to make a claim against Derek's former employer. They had little choice but to agree to settle the claim. The medical evidence confirmed that despite other health problems, Derek's death was caused by asbestosis.

Millions of tons of asbestos were used in the UK in heavy industry, buildings, manufacturing, and power production, particularly during the 1950s, 1960s and into the 1970s.

There are three main asbestos types – blue (also known as crocidolite),

brown (known as amosite) and white (known as chrysotile), with blue and brown the most dangerous. All are now banned.

Popular for insulation and protecting buildings from fire, it was often wrapped around pipes and boilers – including in hospitals and schools.

It was strong; resistant to fire, heat and chemical damage - and cheap. It was also deadly.

DANGER

Workers handling asbestos or working near it were not the only ones exposed to the highly dangerous fibres. Many unknowingly took asbestos home on their work clothes, exposing family members to danger.

People living near asbestos manufacturers were also at risk of exposure if work practices meant fibres contaminated the local area.

While it is no longer used, a lack of funding to remove it means it remains in some of Britain's public buildings, schools, offices, factories, and homes. While generally, it's only dangerous when disturbed, it remains a public health ticking time bomb.

Through the decades, we have represented a spectrum of people with wide-ranging professional backgrounds who have been affected by asbestos illnesses – from plumbers to nurses.

Asbestos-related illnesses are predominantly associated with skilled trades, such as shipyard

in 1999, but it remains one of the biggest work-related killers in the UK. Between 1981 and 2019 more than 4,500 men and women from this region died from the cancer resulting from contact with the material.

Derek's case was complex and initially we didn't have much to go on, because he had been so ill before he died with non-asbestos illnesses. He had also never claimed benefits or taken legal advice for his illness. However, we were determined to get answers for his family.

It's always best for

DEREK'S CASE WAS COMPLEX AND WE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH TO GO ON

workers, plumbers, electricians and heating engineers. But nurses and teachers are also three to five times more likely to develop mesothelioma than the general UK population.

Derek's case is an important reminder that anyone who thinks they are being exposed to asbestos at work should speak to their health and safety manager or UNISON representative as soon as possible. Register that exposure with a GP too, as Derek did, so there's a note on your medical file. UNISON also has an asbestos database you can use.

Margaret found herself having to consider benefits and legal advice for the first time while grieving for Derek. That's not something we would wish on anyone. But I am thankful he had the foresight to mention his exposure to his doctor. By doing that he has enabled his wife and family to get the answers they needed and deserved.

ADVICE

There are strict time limits and procedures to follow when seeking compensation for an asbestos-related illness - usually you need to do it within three years of a diagnosis.

Don't let fear that a workplace has since closed, or uncertainty about where asbestos exposure could have come from, put you off seeking legal advice if you or a loved one has been diagnosed with an asbestos-related illness.

As Derek's case proves, specialist solicitors – such

as the team at Thompsons Solicitors - can still track down insurance policies by accessing databases and insurance details, though it's complex and can take time. If that proves unsuccessful, there's also the possibility to claim compensation through the Diffuse Mesothelioma Payment Scheme, if your mesothelioma was diagnosed after June 25, 2012.

As Thompsons Solicitors marks its centenary year, the firm continues to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with UNISON and the trade union movement. Leading civil rights lawyer, Harry Thompson, established Thompsons Solicitors in 1921 with a vision to use the law to provide protection for working people.

Today, after 100 years, that vision lives on in our expert litigation teams who together form the most experienced personal injury practice in the UK. Throughout our history, we have been involved in every major fight against unfair working practices - and we are still doing it today.

When you make an asbestos compensation claim with Thompsons for you or your family, you will have industry-leading asbestos solicitors on your side. Our expert lawyers will fight for you to receive the maximum compensation in the shortest possible time.

In addition, our specialist asbestos solicitors understand that it can be a difficult diagnosis for you and your family. We can support you by putting

you in touch with asbestos support groups that will help you or your loved one claim benefits, as well as helping seek compensation for your illness.

We are proud to offer free legal advice and protection to UNISON members and their families. We will give you all the information needed to make an informed decision, in plain English, with no obligation to take it further.

As UNISON members, you also keep 100 per cent of any compensation secured. Any legal fees are covered by your UNISON membership.

It's been nearly 50 years since our firm brought the first successful asbestos-related disease case to the House of Lords, with the backing of the trade union and labour movement. All these years later, Thompsons remains determined to fight for people like Derek and Margaret and to campaign alongside UNISON, and other trade unions to increase awareness of asbestos-related illnesses. □

To get help speak to your UNISON representative or visit www.thompsonstradeunion.law.



ANYONE WHO THINKS THEY ARE BEING EXPOSED TO ASBESTOS SHOULD SPEAK TO THEIR UNISON REP

Prognosis

Asbestosis and mesothelioma are both diseases caused by asbestos exposure, but they are not the same. The primary difference is that asbestosis is not cancerous and is limited to the lungs and respiratory tract. However asbestosis can get worse over time and severe cases can place a significant strain on a person's health and shorten their lives. Mesothelioma is an incurable cancer that develops in mesothelial tissue, typically in the lungs and abdomen.



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Photo: Mark Harvey



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Julie Edwards regained her confidence through UNISON's learning programme. Now she wants to help others realise their potential through her job as a careers adviser. **Ruth McGuire** reports

Growing up in a Yorkshire mining village during the 1980s, it was perhaps inevitable that Julie Edwards would develop an interest in social justice.

As a ten-year old, she witnessed first-hand the impact of the miners' strikes on her family and local community in Bentley, Doncaster. She saw 'sadness' within her community and more. She saw miners forced to rely on

food donations to survive, families losing their homes because they couldn't afford to pay their mortgages and at the other end of the spectrum, miners being ostracised because they didn't support strike action.

Clearly the years 1984-85 were a significant period of modern history for Britain, but also for Julie personally. Since then, her own journey through both life and work has been influenced by union activism, but in a different

way. Although most people associate unions with employment rights, it was with UNISON's help Julie found a route back into education as an adult learner.

When she became a young mother at the age of 19, Julie had seemingly left behind any prospects of further or higher education. She had wanted to study to be a nurse, but after having the first of her four sons, she decided to put her family first. She then spent the next few



I'M VERY COMMITTED TO SOCIAL JUSTICE AND IMPROVING PEOPLE'S LIFE CHANCES

decades concentrating on bringing up her children.

Julie has no regrets about the choice she made. But she concedes that mothers face challenges getting back into the workplace, trying to balance work with family commitments. "Years of being at home with children can affect your confidence. When I did eventually get back into work, I always seemed to end up in support roles and I found that support workers didn't really have a voice."

UNISON's 'assertiveness course' was the trigger that led Julie to reflect on her dual roles as a learning mentor at Doncaster Communication Specialist College and her role as a mother. In addition, after going through a challenging time in a job she'd previously held at another institution, the course provided Julie with the personal development she needed to restore her confidence.

ASSERTIVE

She said: "I was supported by the union during a difficult time I had in a previous job. The experience knocked my confidence as an employee and as a person and also affected my friendships. So, I wanted to learn how to be assertive and learn how to disagree with people without coming across as aggressive. The course taught me how to do that."

As for her role as a mother, when the last of her sons went to university, it was a pivotal moment for Julie. "I'm a firm believer in putting your children first as a

mum. But once my sons left home, while it felt strange at first, I then realised I had the luxury of time to reflect."

DEBATE

Being back in education, filled a void that Julie felt was beginning to develop in her life. So, after making a success of the assertiveness course, she was ready for more study and enrolled on UNISON's 'women's lives' course. Its main aim is to explore 'women's life experiences through female writers, discussion and debate' and was just what Julie needed. It allowed her to reflect on her roles at work and in wider society and to think more widely about the roles of women past and present and the expectations that are placed on them as well as the challenges they face.

As a result of the courses, Julie became aware of the limitations she had previously placed on herself. She had been reluctant to reach out for higher level jobs that required skills she believed were beyond her own capabilities. However, she soon learnt and accepted that it was her own self-doubt that was placing limits on her ambitions.

As a result of her increased levels of self-confidence, Julie was successfully appointed to a new part-time role at the college as a careers adviser. She also felt more confident to study at a higher level, so enrolled on a Level 6 diploma course in careers guidance.

"I've never studied to this level before and did

doubt whether I could do it at first, but then realised that if I ran into difficulties, I could always ask for help," said Julie.

Julie admits that the diploma is 'hard work but very interesting'. The course is also consistent with where her heart lies – in helping others to overcome barriers so that they can achieve their potential. She sees education as an agent for change that can increase the life chances of society's most disadvantaged people.

She wants education to do for others what it has done for her - increase their life chances. She has a particular interest in supporting young mothers. She said: "By nurturing young mums in education we can help them be better educated and more insightful parents for their own children – perhaps breaking negative patterns in their families."

As for life outside of work, Julie enjoys walking with her husband and with her Labrador and Romanian rescue dogs. She has also embarked on a new pastime of caravanning and one of her first trips was to the now infamous 'Barnard Castle' in County Durham, destination for Dominic Cummings' celebrated eye test.

Next on Julie's 'to do' list is to finish her careers guidance diploma and then see where her qualification and ambitions take her. "I'm very committed to social justice and improving people's life chances and believe that careers guidance work has a powerful role to play in making a difference to people's lives." □



Julie Edwards – back in education

Photo: Mark Harvey

BEEN THERE, DONE IT

Ruth McGuire speaks to part-time careers adviser and UNISON activist Abdul Rashid and finds a man of many parts

“If you don’t know where you’ve come from, you can’t really understand and know where you’re going,” says activist Abdul Rashid speaking of his journey from Kashmir where he was born, to South Yorkshire, the area he now calls home.

“Our family lived on the side of the country administered by Pakistan,” says Abdul. “Dad left Kashmir in the late 1950s in response to the British invitation to people from the Kashmiri diaspora to help rebuild the British economy.

“My Dad came to England with a few cousins and lived in Birmingham and Newcastle before settling in Sheffield.” Abdul made the 4000-mile trip to join his father in England when he was about five years old. Like many immigrants from Asia and the Caribbean, one of his most enduring memories of arriving in Britain is the weather: “It was absolutely freezing, and everything looked so grey.”

Once he ‘acclimatised’, Abdul, now chair of UNISON’s regional black members’ group, soon settled down to life and education as a

five-year-old. One of the first hurdles he had to overcome was the English language.

Urdu is his first language. However, like most young children learning new languages, Abdul learnt English fairly quickly and has fond memories of primary school.

Secondary school was a different story. “Asian pupils were constantly threatened by other pupils and most of the time, teachers didn’t help much,” he said.

Home life also had its challenges. For economic reasons, (decline of the steel industry) Abdul’s father

Abdul Rashid: Working since he was 13

so he decided to follow the employment route instead.

"I've been working since the age of 13 so was very used to the world of work. I used to help out with my brother-in-law's retail shop and my cousins' market stalls on the Moor in Sheffield," said Abdul.

His first job was in software design. Sadly, it only lasted about six months because the company 'went bust.' He was then unemployed for 18 months. "I must have sent out between 200 and 300 applications during that time," he says.

Abdul puts some of his difficulties in finding a job down to racism and bias. "I'd apply for jobs where I knew that I was the best qualified person but still didn't get it." The seeds for union activism were sewn as Abdul experienced not only racial discrimination but also encountered poor employer practice. "I was victimised and harassed in one of my earlier jobs. I tried to get help from an engineering union but was badly let down."

He had a series of short-term contracts in engineering before finally finding his feet in youth work. "A friend asked me to help out volunteering with young people. I started off as a volunteer, but then progressed to part-time paid youth work." At this point, his father suggested a career change.

Abdul recalled: "Dad said 'you always seem to be going from job to job, why don't you try something else?' " And that's exactly what he did. He took the skills, knowledge and experience he'd gained from his work with young people, retrained and requalified as a careers adviser and found employment with Rotherham local authority, where he has

spent a good few years. The work has taken him across all of South Yorkshire

As someone who spent much of his teenage life without the security and stability of living with his parents, Abdul understands the challenges faced by looked-after children and other youngsters who don't have the guiding influence of their parents.

"I know what it's like to be a young person who has to make important decisions on your own," he says. One of the most important decisions a young person has to make is about their future. And this is where Abdul's own 'lived experience' as someone who faced various challenges both at home and in trying to gain employment, resonates with young people.

As for his union work, Abdul says that one of the triggers for his activism is the invaluable support he received from a union steward when he had difficulties with a particular employer. Abdul was so impressed and in fact inspired by the support he received, that he volunteered to become a UNISON rep. The rest is history. After spending 12 years as a steward, Abdul progressed to becoming a paid convenor.

"I love standing up for other people and their rights," he says. "I also love casework. But it's not always about achieving the ideal outcome a member wants, sometimes it's about making them feel supported and helping them to see that tomorrow is another day, and that they can move on."

Abdul currently splits his time between working part-time in careers advisory work and part-time for UNISON. His next goal is to work full time for the union. □



IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'VE COME FROM, YOU CAN'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING



I LOVE STANDING UP FOR OTHER PEOPLE



was forced to leave England to work in Europe. Meanwhile, his mother had to return to Kashmir for family reasons.

"After that, I lived with my older sister, so she essentially brought me up from the age of 11. I guess I was technically a looked-after child in those days."

After leaving school, Abdul progressed to Sheffield Hallam University where he gained an HND in mechanical engineering. He was considering taking a 'top up' qualification when his mother died unexpectedly. This left him feeling unable to complete any further studies,

Photo: Vicky Matthers



LONG COVID NIGHTMARE

Front line council worker Joanne Boyes has had a horrendous time coping with Long Covid - including near-death experiences. Joanne tells **Claire Donnelly** that help from UNISON was vital

When Joanne Boyes started her new job, she was advised to join the union.

She didn't give it much thought at the time and took up UNISON membership.

But as the 48-year-old

explains, their support has been invaluable during the pandemic.

Like so many frontline workers, Joanne, from Middleton, Leeds, caught Covid before vaccinations were available. She isn't sure whether she was infected doing her job as a skills worker for Leeds City

Council - supporting people who have left hospital - or somewhere else.

But the effect on her life has been catastrophic. After several hospital stays, she has been left suffering with Long Covid.

"Having Covid has had a massive impact on my life and health but I'm so



HAVING
COVID
HAS HAD
A MASSIVE
IMPACT
ON MY
LIFE

Joanne: 'I just want my life back'

grateful to have my job," says Joanne.

Thanks to the support she is still receiving from UNISON, she has been able to keep doing the job she has been doing for 17 years at a pace that she can manage.

"The union helped me negotiate a phased return," she explains. "And that has meant I can carry on doing my job, something I love and where I know I am needed." Joanne assists vulnerable people released from hospital to look after themselves; including support with personal care, food, drink and medication, or by nominating them for long term support.

"My individual colleagues and managers have been amazing - they've done everything they can to support me - but the system isn't set up to deal with people who are living with Long Covid."

She adds: "Long Covid is a hard road, it isn't easy and I am nowhere near myself yet but the policies most employers have around sickness and returning to work don't reflect that.

"The union helped me sort out my hours. I work five hours at a time. I still get very tired - with Long Covid it can feel like you're taking two steps forward, one step back, but I feel lucky I've been able to carry on in my work. So many people haven't.

"I can't imagine having the worry of that, of not having enough money, on top of everything else."

As Joanne says, when she caught Covid, in December 2020, she became

very ill. By the time she was admitted to hospital - rushed in by ambulance - she was suffering from double pneumonia and sepsis.

She spent nine days fighting for her life, receiving oxygen therapy 24 hours a day. When she was eventually sent home from Leeds General Infirmary, she was extremely weak and unwell.

"I'd literally been fighting for my life," she says. "When I got home my body was so tired, I'd get up to make a coffee then have to sleep."

With the support of husband Christopher, 53 and their two grown-up children, she began to recover - only to suffer a series of scary relapses.

She says: "I ended up back in hospital, I had secondary pneumonia and since then I've had four chest infections, a viral respiratory infection and other problems.

"I have scarring on my lungs and my heart rate can be through the roof, I had an ECG again the other day. I can go to bed feeling fine and wake up very unwell. It's an awful condition.

"When you relapse it feels like a kick in the teeth; it feels like it's two steps forward, one step back, so mentally it's hard. But I've got to believe it will end."

On top of coping with her own health, Joanne has lost a close relative to Covid, with other family members needing ongoing treatment for serious illnesses.

Despite everything she was determined to get back to work. In April 2021 she began an eight-week,

phased return. This and a new shift pattern - she responds to a maximum of four calls a shift - has allowed her to continue working while she recovers.

She was referred to the occupational therapy team and a risk assessment was carried out to make sure her needs were documented before she started back in the workplace.

But as Joanne says, employers still need to do more to understand the needs of Long Covid sufferers. "It's very hard because the old rules just don't apply," she explains. "I had the union to help me and my colleagues really have been brilliant but we need policies to change.

"Long Covid is unpredictable. You can relapse and people seem to get bored of hearing that. They run out of patience with you at a certain point. I don't like it any more than they do, but it's the way it is at the moment." Sighing heavily, she adds: "I just want my life back. But you can't give up can you?"

So how does she cope?

As well as support from family, colleagues and her union, Joanne has managed to find strength from within herself too. "I'm stubborn," she laughs.

"You've got to keep going haven't you? You've got to keep plodding on. I love my job, it's hard work, it can be draining but it's important.

"The people we see are often vulnerable. They need our support, they might be scared, we might be the only people they see - that was especially true during Covid - so I have to keep going." □



WHEN YOU RELAPSE IT FEELS LIKE A KICK IN THE TEETH

THE EXTRA MILE



Photo: Vicky Matthers

From her early life on a farm to her struggles as a single mum, Helen Gray knows the virtues of hard work. **Christine Buckley** interviews one of UNISON's most experienced reps

Helen Gray knows how demanding juggling work and family life can be, especially as a single parent. Now one of UNISON's most experienced reps, she started working life the hard way.

As a young single mum, Helen, who lives and works in Harrogate, got a job as a cleaner when her son was small so that she could take him with her while she worked. Then as he neared school age, she learned shorthand and typing so that she could get an administrative job to fit in with school hours.

Although the endless cycle of work and single-handed childcare

could be exhausting, Helen was lucky to land a job with North Yorkshire County Council. It fitted in with the school day and she also benefited from something that can be rare – a very good manager who encouraged and mentored Helen and ensured she had flexible working hours at a time when the arrangement was far from common.

Helen says: "She was great, she pushed me into further education so I could have more opportunities, she enabled me to do short-term cover in various departments so that I'd have a better understanding of the council's work."

And Helen wasn't afraid of hard

work and going the extra mile, having learned the importance of those qualities from an early age. Aged just six and living on a dairy farm in Huddersfield, Helen's father died leaving her mum to bring up her and her brother alone. "My Mum was very encouraging, teaching us always to work and try hard. We were brought up by a very inspirational, strong parent."

In 1989 Helen joined NALGO, the public employees' union and one of those that merged to form UNISON. She became a member because of that good old-fashioned recruitment method – an active shop steward. After a few years Helen went on

“THERE ARE BIG CHALLENGES WITH ISOLATION FOR PEOPLE WORKING FROM HOME

Helen thinks Covid has moved many things seismically at work. “It feels as if we’ve moved on very rapidly with homeworking and trust issues between employers and remote workers. But there are big challenges with isolation and mental health for people working from home. And there is a need for employers to ensure that they communicate well.”

Some time has passed since Helen started work looking after her son Trevor. He has just celebrated his 40th birthday and has young children of his own. Helen and her husband Mick, who was a Communication Workers Union rep before he retired from the post office, have three lively grandchildren – Freddie, seven; Louis, three; and Martha, 18 months.

They are regular babysitters and Helen loves having them round: “They do me good, the children put everything into perspective.”

Helen loves the outdoor life in her spare time. She and Mick are big walkers and love to hike in the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District. They fancy tackling the 182-mile coast to coast walk from Cumbria to North Yorkshire. She’s also just got back into horse riding after loving it as a child.

And to make the outdoors picture complete, she’s also a very keen gardener.

Helen is lucky to live within reach of beautiful countryside, but she also wonders if her interests stem from her early farming life. And there’s no doubt that her working life was influenced by her strong mum. Her mother’s resilience and drive to carry on and do her best, set the framework for Helen’s work ethic and wish to help people when they face difficulty. □



a TUC course in Leeds to become a steward and has never looked back.

The course included shop stewards from a wide range of employers and industries and Helen was inspired by their experiences.

Helen’s workplace was fairly small, and she dealt with issues arising from people being off work through illness, disciplinaries etc. But soon she got involved with the introduction of single status employment in local government – a negotiated joint agreement to ensure equal pay for work of equal value.

There was lots of work to be done on job evaluation and Helen began attending branch meetings to get more support and to become more involved in the union. She went on to become a branch officer and in 2015 became a full-time convenor.

She says she has met some great

people in her UNISON work, but the greatest satisfaction of the job is “giving people a voice in one of the most difficult times in their lives and being there for someone.”

And people can feel very isolated, powerless and frightened if they face unfairness and the loss of their livelihood.

One of Helen’s cases featured in the last edition of this magazine. A care leader for a residential home for children with autism had his income halved because he couldn’t attend his workplace amid the pandemic. Adam Ridley, who has young children, had stayed at home on the advice of his medical consultant because of a chronic lung condition. With the enforced cut in income, Adam had to get a loan to pay the bills until UNISON took his employer to tribunal and won a substantial settlement.

A man with short grey hair and a beard, wearing a white shirt, a red tie, and a dark green jacket, is walking on a city street. He is carrying a blue folder or bag under his left arm. The background shows a blurred city street with cars and pedestrians.

WALKING THE WALK

The son of a NALGO shop steward, Oliver Coppard is a man on a mission. **Claire Donnelly** interviews the Labour party's energetic and committed candidate for mayor of South Yorkshire



I'VE ALWAYS BEEN PART OF THE UNISON FAMILY

He's hotly tipped to be the next mayor of South Yorkshire. And after being chosen as Labour's official candidate in January, Oliver Coppard can't wait to get stuck in to campaigning.

In his first interview since being selected, the 40-year-old's drive, energy and passion for the region that raised him shines through.

Campaigning under the slogan, "Building a new South Yorkshire", he certainly seems like a man on a mission, keen to outline his plans for making real change.

Creating new economic opportunities, tackling poverty and galvanising regional pride are all high on his agenda.

Restoring faith in our political leaders and office - battered by years of Conservative government and the trials of the pandemic - is important to Oliver too.

"So yes, there's a lot to do," he laughs, "But it's very exciting. I'm really honoured to be doing it. I'm just back from campaigning this morning. There's a lot to come, I'm trying not to be too daunted by it all."

He adds: "We're lucky to have such a great team, such great support - from the community, colleagues, unions. It feels good to be getting on with it!"

He might sound cheery but Oliver is under no illusions about the scale of the task ahead. A veteran campaigner, he stood as the parliamentary candidate for Sheffield Hallam in 2015, against then Lib Dem leader, Nick Clegg.

He wanted better for the region he loves - something that powers his thinking now too. "I felt the coalition was taking us for a ride," he explains.

"It wasn't good enough. This is my home, I'm born and raised here. I wanted the best for

everyone who lives here because we weren't getting it - that's what I want now."

So how does he plan to achieve that? He's talked about plans to plant 1.4 million trees, bring public transport back under public control and look at creating jobs through post-industrial innovation.

But as well as bold policies, he wants to change people's outlook too.

"Well, the climate and Net Zero are great challenges and the cost of living crisis is something we have to take action on," he says. "But as well as that I want to get back to this idea of having pride in South Yorkshire. We want to create optimism about how we can build things in our region.

"We don't want people to have to leave here to get jobs or build the career they want, we want people to stay and invest their time and skills here - to know that they can build a good future in South Yorkshire."

As he explains, this battle for hearts and minds is part of a wider economic plan. Oliver, who lives in south Sheffield, adds: "A lot of people go to Sheffield University but don't stay because the economy isn't seen as being big enough to provide the opportunities they need to progress.

"I want people who've grown up in Barnsley to be able to get a great job in Barnsley. It shouldn't be the case that you can't plan for your own future in your own town."

That brain drain is a journey he's all too familiar with. Growing up in Sheffield, politics played a big part in Coppard family life. His dad was a union man and after studying politics at Leeds University, Oliver headed to the US and London to pursue his own career, before coming back to Yorkshire.

"My political life started here,

as a kid," he says. My dad was a NALGO shop steward and I used to go with him to trade union and Labour meetings. I've been part of the trade union movement all my life and I've always been part of the UNISON family.

"I'm really proud to be supported by union members - and really look forward to working with them in future too.

"As a kid I talked about politics a lot, I knew it was something that could bring about change. Working in Westminster I saw politicians up close, when you see people putting their beliefs into practice that's inspiring."

Now he's back in Sheffield, living in a flat 750 yards from where he grew up. On the rare days he's not working he turns to cooking and cycling - the Peak District is a favourite haunt.

So how does he think today's national political landscape will affect the elections? Will the current crises influence voters?

"I'd be surprised if what's going on didn't play a role," he says. "But I'm hoping people will see that the role of mayor is an important one, that there is a reason we have a mayor and that the mayor can do things. I hope people look at the platform and see that if they vote for a Labour mayor it's going to make a difference to their life."

He has talked about plans to do things differently - holding citizens' assemblies and mayoral question times in a bid to become "the most transparent mayor in the country".

As he says: "I'm keen to show people we can do politics in a different way. I want to bring people into the process, to be open. At the moment politicians have a bad name. People are often hearing about the worst of politicians, but 99 per cent of them are working hard for people. Politics can change people's lives for the better." □



WE DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO HAVE TO LEAVE HERE TO GET JOBS



Photo: Mark Harvey

OUT AND ABOUT

A former PCSO, Stacey Lynn now works for St Leger Homes supporting Doncaster council tenants. Dog-lover Stacey also volunteers to help fellow employees. **Helen Hague** reports

When it came to forging a career path, it was clear from the start that Stacey Lynn was never going to be in it just for the money. For the past seven years, Stacey, now 37, has been helping encourage community involvement

among social housing tenants in Doncaster and surrounding villages.

Before that she worked as a police community support officer in the east end of Sheffield. When she was "medically redeployed" after a slipped disc, she chose another police civilian role, supporting people facing

domestic abuse.

The jobs – including her current role as customer involvement officer with St Leger Homes - proved satisfying. "I always wanted to do a job that helps make a difference," she says. "And I like to get out and about talking to people. I hate the idea of being stuck behind a



I ALWAYS WANTED TO DO A JOB THAT HELPS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Stacey and 'excitable gentle giant' Lenny

desk all day”.

No chance of that for Stacey at St Leger Homes, which manages social housing on behalf of Doncaster council. Even in the pandemic, working from home half the time, she manages to get out and about.

She supports tenants who want to set up groups and stage activities - making sure they are properly constituted and insured. She also encourages young volunteers to help make life better for tenants – the job she was initially recruited to do.

For the past 18 months, she's been working with ten young people from across Doncaster who volunteer their own time. They have designed a safeguarding leaflet to help protect children, which is due to be widely distributed throughout the borough. There are also plans for a mural. She is keen to see a renewed drive to encourage more young people who live in St Leger's social housing to get involved.

Stacey also volunteers as one of 20 wellbeing and mental health first aiders, offering confidential support and events for St Leger's social housing 850 employees. Wellbeing advisers are drawn from across the organisation, helping to break down barriers. “Some people think our jobs in customer engagement are a bit fluffy compared to repairs”.

Stacey has always been keen to take courses to boost her skills at work. But she hadn't come across anything like “women's lives”, one of the courses offered free to UNISON members. It

all started with a “random email” from the regional office last year. And though she hasn't yet met other learners in the flesh – the course has been delivered via Zoom in the pandemic lockdown – there is already a real sense of camaraderie, and she can't wait to sign up for another course when this one ends.

From 70s feminism – when women gate-crashed Miss World in protest at the event – to researching and writing about the Matchgirls Strike in 1888 - when women working for Bryant and May walked out to expose appalling working conditions – Stacey has found the topics absorbing.

The office she created “under the stairs” when she started working from home half the time has proved a great place to study. And it probably says a lot about Stacey that she found writing about herself one of the toughest assignments to date – though as a woman working in a male dominated world as a PCSO she had much personal experience to mine. She certainly finds it a lot easier working as a woman in social housing than she did on the streets of the east end of Sheffield.

Though she found supporting people out on the beat in Darnall rewarding – alone in the daytime, in pairs at night - it could be tough at times. Some men did not think women in uniforms should be out on the streets in a police community support role. She also had fireworks thrown at her by children on bonfire night.

As a civilian PCSO, Stacey was able to join UNISON, unlike police officers who

belong to the no -strike Police Federation. She joined as soon as she could – and has found the union “always there” for her whenever she needed support.

There are some cases from her time as a domestic abuse officer that Stacey remembers “as if it were yesterday”: the young woman beaten repeatedly by her partner with a billiard cue for instance. She remembers the frustration when an abuser was found not guilty of assault, despite photos of the bitemarks and the bruises he had inflicted.

Stacey only left the job she loved when the department was subsumed into “Safeguarding” - she feared she would be spending more time behind a desk.

With this experience behind her, Stacey is very pleased St Leger is applying for domestic abuse housing accreditation after canvassing tenants' needs. Increasingly, listening to the “tenants' voice”, through consultations, surveys and other feedback which underpins the way St Leger operates.

Last year, Stacey, who lives with partner Rich and is stepmother to his two children, started looking after rescue dog Lenny. The American Bulldog an “excitable gentle giant”, is six foot tall when standing on his back legs, arrived underweight but is now thriving.

With a busy life at work and home, Stacey is glad to find time in her new under-stairs office to study women's lives on Zoom alongside other women. And when that course finishes, she's pretty sure she'll be signing up for more. □



I HATE
THE IDEA
OF
BEING
STUCK
BEHIND
A DESK
ALL DAY



CARROLL ON THE CASE



TAKEN FOR MUGS

If gangsters are caught they go to prison. If members of the British ruling class are caught they win multi-million pound contracts. Active! columnist **Peter Carroll** runs a rule over our rulers

People who know me will be shocked by this confession, but I feel like I'm living in a gangsters' paradise.

I'm not actually being 'naughty' out on the streets or 'whacking' competitors, but I am watching (probably too many) documentaries

about the lives of villains - murderers, hit men, thugs and thieves - and I'll be honest, geezer, it might be turning me into a wise guy.

During the pandemic I discovered that there was an app on my TV by which I could access the YouTube channel. There are scores of films on this strange media outlet about the

criminal underworld on both sides of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

The Kray twins, Roy 'Pretty Boy' Shaw, Dave Courtenay and 'associates' of the Gambino mafia are just a few of the criminal luminaries who are happy to share their insights on camera.

But on YouTube, the



gangsters' tales sit cheek by jowl with whole lectures from leading academics, and complex debates about the origins of the universe or quantum theory, filmed in huge university halls and libraries.

It's an intriguing mix, especially when you throw in a lot of rare and brilliant music videos. Within a couple of hours, you can engage your mind with the professors, gawp at the spine chilling violence of the gangsters and end with a sing-along with Sinatra, Bob Dylan, Louis Armstrong or whoever else you love listening to.

Whether or not this way of watching the telly is good for me or anyone else (I suspect it's not) there is something very interesting about these gangsters' 'moral code'.

They all profess that they do not use violence on civilians, love their mothers and despise grasses, paedophiles, bullies and bent coppers in equal measure.

This sort of sentiment is expressed more or less across the whole gangster world.

Compare this, arguably dubious, moral commitment with that of Boris Johnson's Tories.

It is crystal clear that they do not feel a need to make any sort of pretence that they are motivated by any moral concerns whatsoever.

If you can stomach it, just bring to mind the sight of the absurd hedge fund multi-millionaire Jacob Rees-Mogg laying across the green benches for a photo opportunity after the

Brexit vote.

That's how the upper classes do gloating, giving the vast majority of people the well-manicured finger while stuffing their pockets with their ill-gotten gains.

And as for gangsterish threats of violence, the Tories gleefully broadcast them as far and wide as possible.

HATRED

Hard-case Home Secretary, Priti 'The Merciless' Patel announced not long ago that "British workers are the biggest idlers in the world".

She is trying to get the word out around the manor that she is not just a 'soldier' but the Chief Enforcer of the brutal 'Boris firm', as they are known by the East End gangs.

Patel's naked contempt for British workers borders on hatred.

It is a warning from the rich and powerful that we await a gruesome fate at their hands. Priti knows where you live - you muppets.

And let's not forget her terrifying plans for those fleeing the hell-holes resulting from the West's endless devastation and slaughter across the Middle East.

She wants to establish a refugee colony on an island thousands of miles from our shores. Or failing that, build a new fleet of Victorian prison hulks to lock these desperate victims in.

Not only will that show these 'invaders' that they and their kids are regarded by the British state as somehow less than human.

It will also energise the whole spectrum of racists the Tories and their outrider Farage so successfully mobilised in their rabid, lying propaganda campaign over Brexit.

The outrages of Johnson and his henchmen and women are starting to spook Tory backbenchers.

The one time cheerleaders for Johnson in the massed ranks of the right-wing media have started to turn against him

There's now a seemingly endless catalogue of proven lies which the Tories are perpetrating.

Illegal Downing Street parties, £1,000 rolls of wallpaper paid for by hushed up donations from a Tory millionaire; the breath-taking corruption of David Cameron's £7.7 million pay day for lobbying work and covid contracts for friends and donors have been widely exposed.

TRAGEDY

How do they get away with all this sleaze, corruption and naked greed at our expense?

Because it turns out they broke no rules, because it turns out there aren't any for the entitled higher orders in Britain.

By contrast, gangsters invariably end up with long prison sentences for their pursuit of money and power. They run the risks and have to deal with the dire consequences. That is their tragedy.

The ruling class face no such punishment. That is not their tragedy, it's ours. □



THERE AREN'T ANY RULES FOR THE HIGHER ORDERS IN BRITAIN



THEY DO NOT FEEL A NEED TO MAKE ANY PRETENCE THEY ARE MOTIVATED BY MORAL CONCERNS



PAUL ROUTLEDGE

MIRROR POLITICAL COLUMNIST

PROFOUND IMPACT OF UKRAINE WAR

Clearly the Russian invasion is having a devastating effect on the people of Ukraine. Inevitably it will take its toll on the UK with some economists predicting a ruinous 10 per cent increase in inflation. The plight of Ukrainians has been taken to the hearts of UNISON members and the union has donated money to an appeal by the International Trade Union Confederation.

The war in Ukraine may be more than a thousand miles away, with no direct British military involvement, but it is battering the UK economy harder than any storm of nature. Gas prices have surged to twelve times higher than a year ago, driving up electricity costs, and petrol prices are setting new records. Inflation is rising rapidly, with some economists fearing that it could reach a ruinous 10 per cent this year. Coupled with the rise in National Insurance payment from April 1 and escalating council taxes, the squeeze on pay packets looks set to be the worst since the 1970s.

The cost is not only financial. The humanitarian impact is also huge. Britain has pledged to take 200,000 refugees fleeing from the Russian onslaught on Ukraine – equal to the population of York. And I think it is no exaggeration to say that the war is also having a profound impact on the national psyche. People feel shocked and upset by the carnage we see every

night on our TV screens. Offers of help have poured in from towns and cities across the Yorkshire and Humberside region. This is a cause that has been taken to people's hearts.

Your union has reached out in solidarity to public service unions in Ukraine whose members are on the frontline trying to save lives as civilian casualties rise. Workers and ordinary people in both Ukraine and Russia are the victims of this war, not the perpetrators.

The union has donated £10,000 to an appeal by the International Trade Union Confederation and is also talking to European and international union federations about how UNISON can practically support those unions and Ukrainian public service workers.

GULL AND CHIPS

Holidaymakers on Yorkshire's Riviera Coast – Whitby, Scarborough, Filey and Bridlington – are used to seagulls stealing their chips.

The wise old burghers of Scarborough have drawn up plans for a summer offensive

against the gulls.

They will include warnings inside fish and chip boxes not to feed the greedy birds. All we have to do now is teach gulls how to read, and we're laughin'.

PEER TAKES GUARD

When I highlighted the case of cricketer Azeem Rafiq and racism at Yorkshire County Cricket Club in the last edition, I never imagined the story would explode nationally – internationally, indeed.

The entire coaching team and top management of the club have gone. Labour peer Kamlesh Patel has taken over as chair, promising change.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission described accounts of racism at YCCC as "deeply concerning" and ruled it likely that "an unlawful act has taken place".

In devastating evidence to MPs, Azeem Rafiq disclosed how he had faced repeated racist comments from senior players throughout two spells between 2008 and 2017, and the club had done nothing about it.

An internal YCCC report on the issue accepted that



PEOPLE
FEEL
SHOCKED
AND UPSET
BY THE
CARNAGE

HEROES

NHS

some of his allegations were true, but declined to discipline anyone.

But punishment swiftly followed Azeem Rafiq's appearance before the Commons sports select committee. The England and Wales Cricket Board – itself criticised for failing to take his testimony seriously – has agreed a twelve-point action plan with Yorkshire, and the Equality Commission says it will monitor events closely, warning that the club could end up in court if it fails to properly implement the plan.

Meanwhile, Yorkshire has lost the chance to stage Test cricket this year, and has lost millions of pounds in ticket refunds. If the stuffed shirts who ran the club had listened, and acted upon, brave Azeem Rafiq's charges of institutional racism, this debacle could have been avoided.

The game was ripe for change. It's a crying shame that it had to come through the public exposure of suffering experienced by players of Asian heritage.

GO GOOLE!

Bradford has made it to the long-list of eight places vying to be named City of Culture in 2025.

"Woolopolis" is up against two contenders from Northern Ireland, plus Cornwall, County Durham, Derby, Southampton, Stirling and Wrexham. A decision is expected from Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries shortly.

Doncaster and Goole threw their hats in the ring of thirty-nine initial bidders. Both are fine places, but at least Donny has an international airport. Goole, with a population of less than 20,000,

had rather less claim, but you must admire its cheek.

ROBBING HOOD

The world's favourite outlaw, Robin Hood, is so popular everybody wants a piece of him.

Kirklees says he's buried in a park near Brighouse, in a grave marking where he fired his last shot. Allegedly.

Now Sheffield Council is in on the act, with a Bring Robin Home campaign, and a new book claiming he was born locally in the village of Loxley.

Naturally, the current Sheriff of Nottingham, Merlita Bryan, will have none of it. "Robin Hood is as much from Sheffield as Jarvis Cocker is from Nottingham," she thunders. "Everyone knows his arch-rival wasn't the Sheriff of Sheffield."

Put that in your quiver! But Hallam University academics who wrote the council book admit their finding might not be "the Robin Hood because there is no such thing."

Which makes it difficult to erect a statue of the outlaw on Steel City's tourist trail, as some demand.

CON-SOLATION?

As I predicted in your last Active! we will not get the much-vaunted HS2 high-speed rail link from Birmingham to Leeds.

And the so-called Northern Powerhouse line from Liverpool to Hull, which I called pie in the Pennines, has lost most of its length. It will now run from Warrington to Marsden, gaining a toehold in Yorkshire before the overhead electric wires come to a halt.

The consolation prize is £200 million for a feasibility study into a light-rail (ie tram) scheme for greater Leeds, whose first phase might eventually cost £2 billion.

This, too, I will believe when I can buy tickets. I'm old enough to remember the old Leeds trams, clanking their way from the city centre to Hunslet. The tracks are still under the road surface in some places. Reusable?

Another crumb from the transport plan: six stations in the Doncaster area – Adwick, Bentley, Conisborough, Hatfield and Stainforth, Kirk Sandall and Mexborough – will benefit from the Transforming Cities Fund with new waiting rooms, platform furniture, upgraded car parks and cycle racks.

Having once frozen half to death on Hatfield station, and covered from the rain on "Mexy", I can attest that this is good news for passengers. And unlike the hair-brained schemes for burrowing 40 miles under the Pennines, it will happen. Work starts this year.

Or should I say "Is scheduled to start." You never know with this lot.

SOUTHERN INVADERS

The southerners are coming, from London, Cambridge and suchlike, in search of a home where they can work.

But they're heading for the Dales, the Moors and the Howardian Hills, not our great cities or towns like Barnsley, so most of us are safe.

They're lured here by idyllic TV films like Yorkshire Farm, and All Creatures Great and Small. He has something to answer for, that 'Erriot. □

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



INSURANCE SCAM

It is amazing the lengths that super rich insurance bosses will go to resist paying desperately needed compensation to people suffering from life-changing injuries. Lawyer **Samantha Hemsley** reports

Thompsons acted for a UNISON rep who suffered life-changing injuries in a road accident in December 2018.

The NHS worker was a passenger in a stationary car in a queue of traffic on a motorway. Despite overhead warning signs, another driver failed to brake and crashed into the back of the vehicle.

Several people were seriously injured, including one who tragically died. The horrific circumstances appear to be straightforward and you would expect - if insurers were as reasonable as they always claim to be - there to be no dispute on liability.

However the insurers delayed the whole process, occasionally ignored it and then fought the claim virtually to the doors of the court over several years. They refused all attempts at negotiation.

Despite the fact there was no evidence from motorway cameras or eyewitness corroboration, they claimed another vehicle caused their insured driver to swerve.

The insurers refused requests to fund vital rehabilitation for

our client, which considerably added to his anxiety and stress. It starved him of essential funds needed to meet his loss of earnings and fund treatment.

With backing from UNISON, we took legal action to force the insurer's hand, although we would rather they had behaved rationally.

A three-day trial on liability was listed for November 2021. The court takes no account of the seriousness of any injury or the desperation of the injured person and moves slowly. Accommodating a three-day trial with experts, lawyers and witnesses on both sides is never swift. Clearly insurers know this and the longer they delay the longer the compensation they were inevitably going to pay, stayed in their bank account.

Both parties instructed accident reconstruction experts who prepared a joint report in which they agreed that if the defendant had braked and steered he would have avoided the collision. Both experts accepted that there was no conclusive evidence to confirm the presence of any vehicle that the defendant said caused him to swerve. Yet still the insurers fought on.

After almost three years of litigation, the insurers tried to buy the claim off by making an offer at 80/20 per cent to save themselves money. That means the client would have to accept 20 per cent of the blame and therefore receive only 80 per cent of his due compensation. On our advice the compromise was rejected - our client was entirely blameless. Again the insurers were hoping he would want to avoid the stress of a trial. They eventually only admitted liability six days prior to the hearing - almost three years after the accident.

The court used the first day of the trial to order a significant interim payment to the claimant.

Insurers regularly use economic leverage against claimants. So litigation, with all its in-built delays, is the only option for the seriously injured. Obviously the claimant wants those responsible for their injuries to accept responsibility quickly so they can get the treatment they need. Too often they have to fight.

To learn more about your legal service speak to your UNISON rep or visit www.thompsonstradeunion.law. □



INSURERS DELAYED AND THEN FOUGHT THE CLAIM VIRTUALLY TO THE DOORS OF THE COURT

Samantha Hemsley
national head
of serious injury
at Thompsons

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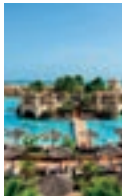


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2022 year of **disabled** **workers**



UNISON has made 2022 the Year of Disabled Workers.

We want to use these 12 months to highlight the experience of our disabled members, the value they bring to our union and to the workplace, and to call for better enforcement of legal rights including the right to reasonable adjustments at work.

UNISON has around 200,000 disabled members and is the union for disabled workers.

Over the 12 months we aim to:

- Raise awareness of the social model of disability and the importance of changes to the workplace and working practices
- Explain what the disability pay gap and disability employment gap mean and how they can be addressed
- Increase our members' confidence to self-define as disabled
- Increase the number of disabled activists in our union.