

# ACTIVE!



MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS IN YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE  
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# IT'S ALL GO!



**P20**

ALL-ACTION JAMIE JAMESON



**INFLATION  
RISES**

**COST OF LIVING  
RISES**

**NO PAY RISES**

**TOGETHER  
WE RISE**

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# THEY WON'T CHANGE

Momentous change has marked the past few months. I know the death of the Queen, who had given a lifetime of exemplary public service, touched many throughout this region.

During the period of national mourning, lying-in-state and funeral ceremony, public service workers carried on doing their duty.

They made sure people were cared for, the streets were clean and safe, the lights were kept on, water flowing and local services running.

Then followed the Tory party's prime ministers' saga. Truss came in, crashed the economy, and resigned. Then came Sunak. I hope not for long. They are both right-wing Tories and our public services will suffer.

Out-of-control inflation and the cost-of-living crisis is driving many of our members to make difficult decisions –

skipping meals, cutting back on essentials, taking on second jobs or considering leaving public service altogether. The crisis is forcing families and pensioners into poverty and public services are in dire need of investment.

I urged both Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak to take action on public service jobs and pay, and to give real help to people suffering from the cost of living crisis. But the truth is, you, our members, have put up with enough hardship. In the health service, we have been balloting 350,000 members for strike action over pay.

The current prime minister could do the right thing by the NHS and other public services, desperate for additional resources. But, he won't. He's already set the scene for public spending cuts and a bonfire of employment rights. Downing Street musical chairs are not in the best interests of our country. We need a general election.



**CHRISTINA  
MCANEA  
GENERAL  
SECRETARY**

*Christina McAnea*

# THEY DON'T CARE

The death of the Queen, respectfully mourned by millions, brought tributes about her dedicated public service over 70 years. It is a concept completely lost on that shambles of a shamed former prime minister, Boris Johnson. Having lied to the Queen, lied to parliament, lied to the whole country and been fined for breaking lockdown rules, he didn't quit with dignity.

Forced out by his own party, it was the exact opposite of dignified. He displayed his arrogant sense of self-entitlement and, to the end, behaved with contempt for truth and the highest public office. No humility, no contrition. Good

riddance.

Then we had a summer being force-fed wild promises from the two candidates vying to replace him. There wasn't much between them – they are both right-wing Tories after all.

First we had Truss causing chaos and then we had billionaire Sunak, with cabinet ministers coming and going at the speed of light. And they all pretend they care about the weak, the sick and the vulnerable. They don't care. They ramp up debt for the next generation with nothing to show for it – except an increase in the number of billionaires and a decrease in the number who can afford to put food on the table. Roll on the general election.



**WENDY  
NICHOLS  
REGIONAL  
CONVENOR**

*W. Nichols*

# UNIVERSITIES IN PAY STRIKES

Staff at the University of Leeds and Leeds Beckett University, including cleaners, security workers, administrators and librarians, have been taking strike action in a long-running dispute over pay.

Members of UNISON and other unions are protesting over the imposition in August of a 'final' pay offer of 3 per cent for most staff and between 3 per cent and 9 per cent for those on pay points 3 to 19. UNISON points out that the higher increases for those on lower rates are partly to keep pay at legal rates.

With RPI inflation at 12.3 per cent the rise is in fact a massive pay cut, following 13 years in which wages in higher education have been falling in real terms.

Members at the two Leeds universities staged a series of strikes in September and October and were expected to continue their campaign unless there was an improved offer. Staff at the University of Leeds took industrial action over pay last year. UNISON's claim was for a rise that matched the retail price index, plus 2 per cent on top.

UNISON regional organiser Neelam Bhabra said: "Striking is a last resort, but there is overwhelming support for continued action. Workers want a meaningful increase to help them cope with soaring prices and inflation."



# THE SOCIALIST SUFFRAGETTE

Sylvia Pankhurst was one of the most underrated political figures of the 20th century and deserves to be celebrated far more widely, activists heard in a lecture at Wortley Hall near Sheffield.

Sylvia's mother Emmeline organized the UK suffragette movement, but Sylvia was the 'socialist Pankhurst' who realised that the oppression of women was related to other forms of subjugation, *writes Phillippa Clark*.

Sylvia was expelled from the

Womens' Social and Political Union by her mother and sister Christabel for being too closely associated with the labour movement.

Giving the 20th Sylvia Pankhurst Lecture, author Rachel Holmes pointed out that Sylvia wrote a pamphlet "The Truth about the Oil War" in which she foresaw struggles making headlines today.

Rachel, author of the biography, "Sylvia Pankhurst Natural Born Rebel", said Sylvia is revered for

her anti-war activism. She turned an East End pub, The Gunmakers Arms, into a nursery and mother and baby clinic – renamed The Mothers Arms.

There is a campaign to fund a statue of Sylvia to be erected at Clerkenwell Green in Islington north London [www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/sylviastatue](http://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/sylviastatue)

The campaign website is [www.gn.apc.org/sylvia pankhurst](http://www.gn.apc.org/sylvia pankhurst)

**P22 Nothing's too good for the workers**



# FIRST WOMAN AS TOP OFFICIAL

It's all changed at the top among senior officials at UNISON in Yorkshire and Humberside, with Karen Loughlin taking over from John Cafferty as regional secretary.

Karen (interviewed on page 24) is the first woman to take the post, assuming office at a time of massive challenges for the union.

As part of his valedictory message, John pointed out that UNISON is faced with a government under Liz Truss which holds public services in contempt and is hell-bent on replacing our National Health Service with a US-style system based on insurance: "If the government gets its way, the NHS would be reduced to a very basic safety net for emergencies only," he says.

UNISON members working in the health service feel "unrewarded and exhausted" since the covid pandemic and many are voting with their feet.

"Forty per cent of NHS staff are entitled to retire within the next two or three years, so the exodus will get very much worse," he says.

"It's no better elsewhere in public services. In local government for instance, social workers are continually bad-mouthed, set impossible targets and given huge caseloads. A situation familiar to so many other public service workers.

"In the police service, large numbers of civilian staff and PCSOs have been cut in an attempt to increase the number of police officers. It hasn't worked because there is a shortage nationally of about 2000 officers.

"It has also meant that police officers are having to do essential work that should be carried out by civilian staff. As a result of prejudice



Karen – Members must realise they have political choices

and ignorance, the Tories have made a series of disastrous choices about the police service and public services generally. It is a state of affairs graphically illustrated by the increasing amount of raw sewage released into rivers and the sea"

John said Karen faces a monumental task, "but she is an experienced and highly capable trade unionist who I'm sure will more than meet the challenges."

John added that it had been 'a fantastic privilege' to work for an organisation devoted to helping people and bettering society for all. "I have worked with some fantastic people, too many to mention. I just wanted to say thank you to everyone for your help, support and the great work you've done over the years. Thanks for all the gifts, cards and best wishes."

John, who lives in Durham, hopes to remain active in the Labour party and continue to help UNISON.

Regional convenor Wendy Nichols said: "I have worked with John for many years, he was my regional organiser when he first moved to Y&H from Scotland. John



John – Karen will more than meet the challenges of the job

then went on to become a regional manager and has been regional secretary for the last 11 years. John has always been committed to UNISON and dedicated to making a difference to UNISON members."

Karen thanked John for all he has done for UNISON members in Yorkshire and Humberside: "He will be missed."

Karen sees one of her tasks as ensuring members realise they have political choices. "They have to understand that they can make a difference in a general election. Part of my role is to persuade people that voting does make a difference." On a practical level, Karen believes that the union has to engage more with its members. "We have to get our profile out there," she says. "Lots of our members are working from home these days. We have to adapt ourselves to deal with that. They must be able to see our activists. "With the best will in the world, people don't want to hear from me. We want members to tell their stories. It has much more traction if it comes from them."

## EDITOR'S NOTE

This edition of Active! had to be delayed several times because of the chaotic developments in government. It was correct when we went to press.

P24 Making a difference

# WHEN SEWAGE HITS THE FAN

Our newspapers got hot under the collar over this summer's heatwave and then equally irate when torrential rain let loose a tsunami of sewage into the sea, says consulting editor **Mary Maguire**

**Y**ou could take your pick from the headlines: 'Phew what a scorcher!'; 'The heatwave from hell'; 'Dustbowl UK!'; 'Blowtorch Britain'; 'Heatwave meltdown!'. As temperatures soared, records were broken and tempers frayed at airports and docks, sub-editors fast ran out of screaming superlatives to describe the summer's heatwaves.

Basking in Saharan temperatures, large groups of people were seen flocking to beaches and rivers or fleeing to foreign parts, where it was even hotter. The ordeal of airport misery with cancelled flights, Brexit queues and lost luggage, was worth it to many, to escape the never-ending Tory leadership havoc and economic chaos.

Let's face it, when top politicians can't behave like adults, it is sometimes best to just talk about the weather.

Editors were happy to oblige. Meteorology, climatology and geology boffins, accompanied by charts and statistics, became the nation's daily news diet.

"Earth sends a warning", declared the *i* newspaper, running a graphic showing the 40c reached in Sheffield made it hotter than Cairo, Tehran, New Delhi, Islamabad and Dubai. The *Guardian*, too, struck a serious note, warning: "It's not too late to avert the climate crisis from becoming more deadly – but the window is closing."

According to the *Hull Daily Mail*, arguments raged over the heatwave dilemma: "Should you keep your windows open or closed?" And more seriously, it reported on the plight of the homeless as it described "heatwave horror for Hull's homeless as they desperately chase the shade".

One hapless TV reporter, out and about vox-popping the good people of Sheffield as to whether climate change was to blame for melting Britain, encountered one wag who sagely said: "I blame the weather".

Reams of "how to cool off" articles were published. The *Halifax Courier* helpfully advised readers to keep out of the sun and "avoid physical exertion". And the *Yorkshire Post* told us to "drink lots of water", at the same time as *Yorkshire Water* announced a hosepipe ban. Column inches were devoted to advice from the NHS about the impact on the vulnerable; from fire chiefs about avoiding fires and whether car petrol tanks would explode in the heat and from child health experts. Physicians took to the airwaves to explain in graphic detail what heat could do to the body.

But one *Yorkshire Post* columnist, railed against this "nanny state of ours" and that Cobra meeting talk of "emergencies" and "danger to life" came from the "prophets of doom" that was the UK Health Security Agency. It was "scaremongering" and he, for one, would continue to enjoy the sun until it "became illegal".

The heatwave came to an end with a bang, as predicted by the *Examiner*. But thunderstorms and torrential rain let loose yet another horror. The great sewage scandal. Tons of it dumped in rivers and seas as so-called "storm overflows". *ITV* news explained how *Yorkshire Water* had been "dumping sewage in rivers and seas every 18 minutes".

Pity the poor holidaymakers on Scarborough beach, which had the most sewage spills this summer, warned not to use their fans to cool down in case .... well you get the picture.

"Public outrage" over the water companies actions featured heavily. The story even made the *Washington Post*. Headlined "The Stink Over Britain's Sewage".

It continued: "Pristine waterways have been polluted with raw sewage, yielding photos of grey-brown sludge and thousands of dead fish killed by toxic waste. It's a brave person who orders oysters right now." It added: "The real question is why regulators have done such a poor job of policing private companies." I think we should be told. □



I BLAME THE WEATHER



Mary Maguire



# there for you

supporting UNISON members  
when life gets tough

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

Please make sure our members  
are aware of the help that is  
available in these difficult times.

UNISON members struggling  
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- ☑ Contacting their  
Branch Welfare Officer
- ☑ 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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**UNISON**  
*the public service union*





# A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Uncharacteristically Boris Johnson's government proposed some really progressive changes to employment rights - more typically they reneged on them. As things stand we will have to wait for Labour's proposals, says Thompsons' solicitor **Rachel Ellis**



For most people Boris Johnson's legacy will be the multiple scandals he became mired in - but he also failed to deliver on many of his promises. One of the key pledges he reneged on, was the government's agenda on employment rights.

In 2019 the government announced it would be introducing an employment bill. However, due to the pandemic, the bill and its wide-ranging and potentially positive reforms were put on hold. Post-pandemic, the government said that the bill would be re-introduced as soon as parliamentary time allowed.

However, in both 2021 and 2022, the government failed to include the bill in its plans for the parliamentary session. With Rishi Sunak now installed as PM, what, if any, are the prospects for the Bill progressing any time soon?

The economy and how we work has changed drastically over the last decade. The bill proposed to address some of these issues. Rare for a piece of Conservative legislation, the proposals were broadly welcomed by the Labour party and the TUC.

The Bill proposed changes including:

- Extending redundancy protection for those who are pregnant or on maternity leave for up to six months following their return to work. The 'protected period' currently ends when an employee returns from leave. In a bid to address this, the proposal was that employees would continue to have priority for alternative

roles in a redundancy situation over the extended period.

- Promising 12 weeks' paid neonatal leave for parents whose babies spend time in neonatal units.

- Proposing that working carers would be allowed an additional five days' unpaid leave to carry out their caring duties.

- Forcing employers to pass on tips and service charges to staff.

- Proposing a right to request a 'predictable contract'. This would give staff with variable hours the right to request a more predictable working pattern after the completion of 26 weeks' service.

Particular concern over the delay, centred on the missed opportunity to enhance the rights of women. In May 2022, prior to the latest Queen's speech, the TUC together with women's organisations such as the Fawcett Society, Maternity Action and the Women's Budget Group joined forces to release a statement calling for change.

Unfortunately the government failed to include the reforms in the Queen's speech in May.

Other politicians have taken matters into their own hands. The Conservative MP for Watford, Dean Russell, has launched a private members' bill - The Employment (Allocation of Tips) Bill 2022-23. The Bill seeks to ensure that tips and service charges are passed onto staff in full. The Bill is currently still in parliament, but it is hoped this will become law, ensuring staff get to keep their hard-earned gratuities.

The Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Bill, was introduced

by Stuart McDonald MP (SNP) on July 15 with cross party support. Going further than the original proposal, it would allow parents to take up to 12 weeks' paid leave, in addition to other entitlements such as maternity and paternity leave.

So what are the prospects for the future? Under the new prime minister, is it possible that this issue might make it back on to the government's agenda? It's not looking likely. The recent introduction to parliament of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill 2022 could potentially lead to the biggest setback in workers' rights for decades. If the Bill goes through, it will mean that much of UK employment law derived from EU legislation, will be automatically revoked at the end of 2023. This could remove wide-ranging rights we have come to take for granted such as the Working Time regulations, aspects of the Equality Act 2010, TUPE, rights for agency workers and parental leave rights.

If steps are not taken to re-enshrine these protections in UK law then worker's rights in many areas will be decimated. It does not appear likely that restoring these rights will be top of Rishi Sunak's agenda. Given the recent economic turmoil and with the Conservatives sliding in the polls it can only be hoped that the rights of workers will rest with the manifesto of the Labour party. It is hoped that this will include a commitment to protecting existing rights as well as advancing them further. □



## THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS WILL REST WITH THE MANIFESTO OF THE LABOUR PARTY

Rachel Ellis, Thompsons' Solicitors' regional employment rights manager for Yorkshire



“ THE ECONOMY AND HOW WE WORK HAS CHANGED DRASTICALLY

# SANTA SUNAK ... HE AIN'T

Public services are set to be devastated by the Tories' fresh bout of austerity which is likely to be far worse than their cost-cutting exercise a decade ago. **Paul Routledge** reports



We are back in the land of austerity. After all the denials and promises, it's 2010 and George Osborne all over again, and probably worse. It's the Conservative way.

We don't know how much worse, because new prime minister multi-millionaire Rishi Sunak can't decide until it's almost Christmas. His chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, will reveal everything on November 17 after we've gone to press. Treasury officials are talking about a package of cuts and tax rises totalling £50 billion. Many, if not all, will fall on public services because that's where so much of the money is spent.

Details are sketchy, but when a Tory premier talks about tough choices

and difficult decisions, he doesn't mean the bankers whose bonuses he has uncapped. He means working people and their families. Santa Sunak he ain't.

On past performance, expect tax hikes, and wage and benefit freezes, sending the cost of living crisis into overdrive. Experts talk about a 1.5 per cent cut in overall spending to plug a 'black hole' in the public finances. That doesn't sound much, but the government's total budget for this year is £1,087 billion, so every little percentage counts big.

Such is the bleak backdrop to UNISON's ballot of 400,000 health workers who are being asked if they will strike over the government's 'award' - imposition would be a better word - of a

£1,400 pay rise across the NHS. That's roughly four per cent, less than half the current 10 per cent inflation rate.

Health and social care has a new secretary of state, Steve Barclay. A former Army officer and lawyer, and hard-line Brexiteer who was briefly Boris Johnson's chief of staff during the Partygate scandal. He is nothing if not consistent. Barclay has voted 47 times for cuts in welfare benefits. He was reappointed to his old job to deliver cuts demanded by the new chancellor, former health secretary Jeremy Hunt, the smiling assassin of the junior hospital doctors in their 2016 pay dispute.

Sunak has moved swiftly to put his personal stamp on government. As the first British-Asian premier - and



HEALTH SECRETARY BARCLAY HAS VOTED 47 TIMES FOR CUTS IN WELFARE BENEFITS.

at 42, the youngest for more than two hundred years – he sacked many of his predecessor’s cabinet and brought in his own people. He backed Hunt’s demolition of so-called “Trussonomics”, but refused to come clean on two key issues of spending: retention of the triple lock of state pensions, and uprating welfare benefits next April by inflation.

He dangled the possibility of doing the latter, claiming (with a neck that must have been made in a foundry) that the Tories always look after the most vulnerable in society.

Keeping the triple lock – which would give pensioners their biggest-ever lift – is a Conservative manifesto pledge from the 2019 election. Sunak knows it would be electoral suicide to abandon this policy, but Tory advisers are already calling for it to be scrapped after the promise ‘expires’ in 2024.

Continuity rules in defence. Sunak was straight on the phone

to President Zelenskyy of Ukraine on his first day in Number Ten, promising that aid will continue ‘until the conclusion of the war’. The UK is the second biggest contributor to the war effort, after the USA, handing over £3.8 billion-worth of economic and military aid in less than six months.

But here he may be in trouble. In her Tory leadership bid, Liz Truss rashly promised to virtually double military spending to 3 per cent of gross national product by 2030, meaning an extra £157 billion over the next eight years alone.

Defence secretary Ben Wallace, who retained his seat in the cabinet, looks to the new government to redeem this pledge, hinting that he might resign if it isn’t. Sunak called the target ‘arbitrary’ and refused to be bound by it, while Hunt even talks of a defence spending freeze for four years.

This disagreement could cause the first cabinet split, while the

second might emerge in Belfast, where the simmering Northern Ireland crisis has exploded again. The assembly has collapsed, and fresh elections are due to take place. This is not just about the province, it’s a serious issue threatening a trade war with the European Union.

It’s not all doom and gloom. With his party riding high in the polls, on a margin of up to 27 points over the Tories, and a successful conference behind him, Keir Starmer has put Labour on a pre-election footing, appealing to members to be ready for a snap poll. I don’t think it will come to that, because Tory MPs are sheep who follow their leader, not turkeys who vote for Christmas. With a Commons majority of 70-plus, Sunak can ride out parliamentary storms.

But you never know in politics. By-elections are pending in Chester, where the sitting Labour MP Chris Matheson quit over inappropriate sexual advances, and West Lancashire, where Rosie Cooper called it a day after a string of death threats from a neo-Nazi racist gang. If the Tories do as badly as their poll ratings suggest, public pressure for an election could become irresistible.

Whenever the election comes, we’ll say goodbye to some retiring Yorkshire MPs: in Doncaster the redoubtable deputy speaker Dame Rosie Winterton; Paul Blomfield in Sheffield Central – where comedian Eddie Izzard and broadcaster Paul Mason are vying to succeed – and Barry Sheerman, veteran member for Huddersfield.

Meanwhile Starmer has assembled an effective shadow cabinet, with a strong Yorkshire presence: Rachel Reeves, chancellor; Yvette Cooper, home secretary; John Healey at defence; Ed Miliband, climate change and Louise Haigh at transport. They look more like a government in waiting than the government waiting for its end.

The magic roundabout of politics is moving faster than ever. ■

## “ KEIR STARMER HAS PUT LABOUR ON A PRE-ELECTION FOOTING





# AND THEY'RE OFF!

Whatever the trials and tribulations of UNISON members and their families in Yorkshire and Humberside, they always had Doncaster raceday to look forward to. Until Covid struck in 2020. For two years there were no racedays as the pandemic tore through the UK and UNISON members found themselves among the frontline troops in the fight against the disease. But on July 30 hundreds of UNISON members together with their friends and families went out to enjoy a flutter. Let's hope it's odds-on for next year to!



Caption





# LEVELLING DOWN

Active editor **Barrie Clement** hears the devastating truth about the huge impact of the cost of living crisis on UNISON members. One social care worker who had been on long term sick leave with cancer, was forced to eat cereal for most meals because she couldn't afford to put the oven on. It is just one example of the egregious effect of the explosion in living costs

Full-time convenor Stella Smales believes we could be heading for a future of dire poverty, as depicted by William Hogarth in his 18th century engraving "Four times of the Day: night"





The huge increase in the cost of living is little more than an interesting statistic to the multimillionaires in the City of London - and a mere political nuisance to our new prime minister Rishi Sunak. But for UNISON members earning anywhere near the minimum wage, double-digit inflation is devastating and an indication of the desperate, gnawing poverty they endure day in, day out.

Even for members on higher grades, such as nurses, the impact is massive and crippling. And courtesy of the disastrous mini-budget it's got much worse. Sunak's impending autumn statement on November 17 won't make it any better for working people.

The price of food has rocketed with bread, cereals, milk, cheese and eggs rising the fastest. Predictably food retailers have been enjoying a surge in returns. Tesco's pre-tax profits trebled to £2bn last year.

The explosion in interest rates which followed the mini-budget, has led to deep concern among UNISON members in Yorkshire and Humberside, many of whom are telling officials that they are in danger of losing their houses because of soaring mortgage rates.

The rising cost of fuel at the pump has been a burden for some time, but it hasn't been a burden for companies like Shell and BP who have been reporting huge profits.

Energy bills have been hitting new highs and so have the profits of British Gas owner Centrica.

The chief executives of Britain's top 250 companies trousered an average 38 per

cent pay increase, with median pay rising to £1.72m in 2021. And to rub salt in the wound, the Truss government lifted the cap on bankers' bonuses.

Even before Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng did his worst (and got sacked for it), Rob Allen, secretary of UNISON's Doncaster district and Bassetlaw branch, spent much of his time coping with the impact of this government's malign neglect.

"It is affecting our members massively," says Rob. "Most of them haven't had a real pay rise since 2008. The war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, Brexit and the mini-Budget have all contributed to the huge increase in prices.

"Members are coming to me all the time, particularly colleagues in the NHS. In the community nursing sector they have been hit particularly hard by the rise in petrol prices. Many of them tell me they can't afford to go to work because they can't afford the petrol. We are constantly talking to trusts about their mileage rates. They are increasingly inadequate."

Rob, who is also staff-side secretary representing members of other unions, points out that because of the horrendous shortage of staff in certain areas and the impact of the covid 19 pandemic, members are being asked to perform tasks above and beyond their grades.

"Health care assistants on band 2 who take home roughly £1200 a month are being asked to undertake nursing procedures and they are not being paid to do so.

This is particularly so for members working on the wards. We are calling for them to be upgraded as a matter of urgency."

As UNISON general secretary Christina McAnea said in her speech to the union's annual conference this year, struggling families are having to choose between eating and heating.

"A lot of members are forced to go to food banks," says Rob. "A couple of them have come to me crying because they feel humiliated."

Even members on higher grades are suffering. "One staff nurse told me that she can't afford to put food on the table for her family and she pointed out she was in a good job."

Apart from negotiating with management, Rob said the union was also helping through its There for You welfare charity which provides a confidential advice and support service for members and their dependants.

"We're very fortunate to have this service. It gives help with the purchase of white goods, school uniforms; it provides a one-off payment to help with winter electricity bills. It can also help with emotional issues." (see panel on page 16).

Ultimately however, Rob believes the solution is political. "We need to campaign against this government. Neither the local government nor the NHS pay deals are acceptable. All sectors need to band together.

"An increase in wages is not causing inflation. Higher profits are feeding



ONE  
STAFF  
NURSE  
TOLD  
ME SHE  
CAN'T  
AFFORD  
TO PUT  
FOOD ON  
THE  
TABLE

ROB ALLEN



A GOOD  
WORK  
ETHIC  
AND  
GOOD  
WILL,  
DON'T  
PAY  
THE  
BILLS.

STELLA SMALES



inflation. It all boils down to capitalism.”

Stella Smales, a full-time convenor for adult social care in Leeds, said members who look after patients discharged from hospital find it almost impossible to budget for fuel.

“They don’t know what they’ll be doing from one day to the next. One day they’ll be visiting Mr Brown three miles down the road, the next day it’s Mrs White 20 miles away,” said Stella.

One member who works part-time and lives on her own said that when it was coming up to pay day she’d been forced to borrow money to put petrol in the car. “She started crying and said she’d borrowed the money from the woman sitting next to her in the meeting.”

Stella, who has worked in mental health care for 20 years, has told management that people on the lowest grades, all of them dedicated and loyal employees with years of experience, simply don’t have enough money to do their job.

Stella asked her boss if there was a contingency plan for staff who didn’t have enough money. “She replied that staff should continue to discuss the issue with managers. She couldn’t help us. It’s disgusting. They’re struggling to get people into vacant posts, but the advertisements say that applicants should preferably have a car. No wonder they are struggling to recruit.

“One social care worker who had been on long term sick with cancer, said she was forced to eat cereal for most of her meals because she couldn’t afford to put the oven on. And we’re living in the fifth richest country in the world! A good work ethic,

goodwill and a good nature, don’t pay the bills.

“The government says it understands people’s struggles. If you believe that, you’ll believe anything.

“Our members acknowledge that after 12 years the current pay offer is still a pay cut in real terms. To safeguard the future of these services we need to fight for better pay, terms and conditions.”

Stella says the dire depictions of poverty by 18th century artist and social satirist William Hogarth are becoming reality in 21st century Britain.

Members in all sectors covered by UNISON are suffering from the rocketing cost of living. Take police staff.

Chair of South Yorkshire Police (SYP) branch Dean Rowson says: “It’s a common misconception that our members are well-paid. Many of our members are actively looking for other work because the current pay does not reflect what they do. The recent pay award was abysmal and has just made matters worse.”

Those on the lowest grade, such as switchboard operators and cleaners, are paid £9.92 an hour increasing to £10.20 after two years. “Aldi pay their new cleaners £10.30 per hour,” says Tony Whomersley, branch secretary.

Dean and Tony regularly attend problem-solving meetings with management. The current hot topic is an inability to retain staff. Many of their colleagues are looking at job re-evaluation as a means of increasing their salaries. The current levels just do not reflect their responsibilities.

A “smarter ways of

working” project at SYP is an attempt at enabling some staff to work from home. Management is trying to cut down on office space and therefore on overheads. “However managers are not taking into account the price of electricity,” he adds, “particularly the cost of heating a home during working hours in the winter months.”

Dean points out that some police staff are using food banks. Times are particularly hard for single parents. “There used to be a pride in working for the public sector – a pride in doing something worthwhile – but when Aldi and Asda are offering higher wages it’s hard to blame people for changing jobs.”

As Rob Allen says, it seems the only long term solution to this cost of living crisis, is political.



THE RECENT PAY AWARD WAS ABYSMAL AND HAS JUST MADE MATTERS WORSE.

DEAN ROWSON



## THERE FOR YOU

Members experiencing financial and emotional difficulties can contact UNISON’s welfare charity, There for You. It provides confidential advice on debt, budget planning and help to ensure families are receiving the benefits to which they’re entitled.

There for You credit union gives UNISON members access to low interest loans and a range of savings products through a UK network of partner credit unions.

Help can be provided towards the costs of a wellbeing break, depending on individual financial circumstances.

There For You also provides a confidential service for those experiencing personal difficulties - over the phone or in person.

UNISON’s charity points out that it needs the help of branches to make sure it can support as many members as possible over the next year.

thereforyou@unison.co.uk or call 020 7121 5620



**FROM THE  
FRONTLINE  
TO THE  
BREADLINE**

**TOGETHER  
WE RISE**





# BREAD FOR ALL AND ROSES TOO

Regional convenor Wendy Nichols believes members should not be forced into a position where they need to strike, but there may be no alternative. **Mary Maguire** reports

While the Conservatives spent their summer picking the wrong new leaders, workers from many industries continued to strike over the way their pay was diminishing as the cost of living increased.

'Militant unions' were attacked by Liz Truss in her once-in-a-lifetime speech as leader to the

Tory faithful. Rishi Sunak is no better. Just like all on the Right, he has signalled cuts to come in our services and is presiding over the fateful Retained EU Law Bill that will strip away workers' protections.

Transport workers, postal staff, BT employees, dockers, journalists and barristers have already taken action. UNISON members, too, are saying 'enough is enough'. Some,

such as those at the University of Leeds, Leeds Beckett University and the Coal Mining Museum have taken action locally, others, including 350,000 NHS members are holding strike ballots.

"She knew that strike action had to be on the cards; and, as a skilled negotiator, she knows when to deal that hand. It's a big challenge for the union trying to ensure that



WE HAVE  
TO BE  
PREPARED

## “ PLAUDITS ARE ALL VERY WELL, BUT DON'T PAY BILLS

post-pandemic, post-Brexit world of spiralling energy costs, they deserve to be treated better.

“There is understanding and sympathy from the public about the huge rise in the cost of living, the erosion of living standards and of what you can buy in the shops or the bills you can pay,” she says. “They understand, because they are facing it, too. And, instead of coming up with solutions, the Tories trot out the same old claptrap. Their knee-jerk answer to everything is to blame the unions, to start talking about banning strikes in the public services, instead of getting round the table to negotiate.”

Just like many UNISON members, Wendy has been tweeting her support for striking workers, not just in UNISON disputes, but showing solidarity with others. Having stood on the picket line with Openreach/BT workers in Selby, she tweeted: “Good luck. Let’s hope the shareholders put pressure on your management to do the right thing. Without you there would be no profits to share. Do the right thing and give them a decent pay award”.

And during the recent postal dispute, she displayed a poster in her window refusing to accept mail delivered on strike days. She declared: “Good luck and solidarity with all CWU members in Royal Mail on strike today. My message to management is get back round the table and give them a decent pay rise. They worked throughout the pandemic and they deliver the profits that you live off for your bonuses. They deserve better.”

Solidarity may be a dirty word amongst the Tory right, but in the trade union movement it’s an article of faith. Wendy says: “Never forget that freedom of association and the right

to strike is a fundamental human right. It’s right there in the International Labour Organisation’s convention on the right to organise and bargain collectively, which the British Government was the first to ratify in 1948. It’s right there in the Council of Europe’s social charter of 1961, which the British Government was the first to ratify. It’s right there in the UN’s international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights of 1966 and it’s enshrined in Article 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights.”

Union members, says Wendy, should not be forced to strike to get a better deal. The Government should not forget “who nursed people back to health or held the hands of the sick and dying, who kept the streets clean and safe, who kept the lights and heat on, who kept food and post deliveries going, who kept our children, our vulnerable and elderly safe and well. Applause and plaudits are all very well, but don’t pay the bills. In the words of the old Suffragist slogan, let’s have ‘Bread for all, and Roses too.’ □



any strike ballot is legal and that it complies with strict laws and tight timetables. So we have to be prepared.”

Just like many thousands of members across Yorkshire & Humberside, Wendy has been on strike before to defend, at various times, pension rights, pay and conditions.

“Striking is a last resort,” she told me. “Whenever I put my cross on that ballot paper to say yes to strike action, it was never a decision I took lightly, flippantly or to hold anyone to ransom. It was after months of talks, of getting nowhere, of being told here’s the final offer – you won’t get anything more. And it was after weighing up the loss of pay, the impact it would have on the people who rely on the services I provide and the impact of doing nothing”.

This time round, although we may wonder at the fickleness of support for public service workers, Wendy believes it is still strong. Emerging from the past two years of covid curbs into a



Photo: Mark Harvey



# THE HYPER-ACTIVIST

There aren't enough hours in the day for all-action Jamie Jameson. **Christine Buckley** reports

If professional hats were actual accessories, Jamie Jameson would need a huge wardrobe. The UNISON equality and diversity rep is a man of many roles – from public sector worker, union activist, youth mentor and Rotarian to a qualified professional basketball coach and founder of G-Corp Basketball Club – to mention a few.

But there is just one strong thread connecting his extensive portfolio – a deep-seated belief in community.

Jamie was born in Trinidad and Tobago, his mother was a senior nurse in the NHS – a State Registered Nurse under the old grading system – and his father was a chief engineer with the Department of Agriculture. Jamie came to England when he was young and made Sheffield his home.

He was totally dedicated to serving

the community and the Gospel Church reinforced that. “It was all about giving back to the community and helping each other. My parents brought me up to be very disciplined and community-minded,” he says. These principles led him to start work for South Yorkshire Police and UNISON.

Jamie joined the union in 1991, and quickly became an equality and diversity rep. He took a number of UNISON-run courses and began to represent members at employment tribunals. He also made contact with regional representatives with the aim of ensuring those without a voice could be heard.

Eventually Jamie became chair of Yorkshire and Humberside regional black members committee and then went on its national equivalent.

“UNISON has opened a lot of

doors for me,” he says. “I have been given the opportunity to make a real difference and have come into contact with a lot of interesting people.” Jamie is a natural networker and his activities grew as he came into contact with local leaders and organisations running community-led schemes.

Jamie splits his time between the South Yorkshire Police and Sheffield City Council where he helps safeguard young people with disabilities. He has reduced his paid employment to a part-time working week, but his ‘hat’ collection is getting bigger.

As part of his police work, he also now acts as a mentor for its Inspiring Youth awards programme. This involves going into schools and working with year 9 and 10 children to help them achieve their



educational goals.

"I enjoy mentoring young people, it gives me great joy to see how they progress both personally and professionally," he says. Now that equality, diversity, and inclusion are strong parts of the employment lexicon, some may think that there isn't much more work to do. Jamie strongly disagrees: "We still have problems where people don't have a voice. That could be for many reasons - for example, elderly people often don't have a voice because of technology and everything going digital. They often can't keep up with that."

His work in the union and elsewhere also shows him that abuse and prejudice are still sadly commonplace. And frustratingly it cannot always be properly called out. "Harassment, discrimination and victimisation are still prevalent in the workplace and unfortunately it can be extremely difficult to find a satisfactory solution for the member.

"This may be because too much time has passed, or the member does not want to bring forward a case as they are fearful to vocalise how poorly they have been treated. It is very sad to see that despite all of the progress made, some things have remained the same."

Five years ago Jamie's sense of community led him to join - and become a passionate member of - the Sheffield Rotary Club. He became its first black president in its 102 year history. Throughout his presidency, Jamie felt strongly that the club should be representative of the community it serves, and so he actively encouraged people from various social and ethnic backgrounds to take part. He was especially proud to



Jamie's mother  
Linda was a  
senior NHS nurse

promote the club's first black history month.

On a personal note, Jamie is a keen sports fan: he is a professional basketball coach and also enjoys watching football and cricket. Using his own money, he founded the G-Corp basketball club in 2005 with his family, after he realised that young people in his community wanted to join a basketball team but were unable to afford the fees.

Jamie is proud that his team that started from humble beginnings has gone on to win the Sheffield basketball league several times over the years. With the large amount of work associated with wearing all his hats, you would think there wasn't much time for anything else,

but Jamie makes the most of his leisure time too. When he's not working for UNISON, his paid employment, his community work and enjoying sport, he also finds time to travel and sample international cuisine. And one thing is clear, Jamie isn't about to hang up any of his hats. □

• Jamie and G-Corp Basketball Club appreciates the support and donations given by family and friends over the years as well as UNISON - Yorkshire & Humberside regional black members committee, South Yorkshire Police and the SYP UNISON branch, Sheffield City Council, Sheffield Rotary Club and the Freshgate Trust Foundation.

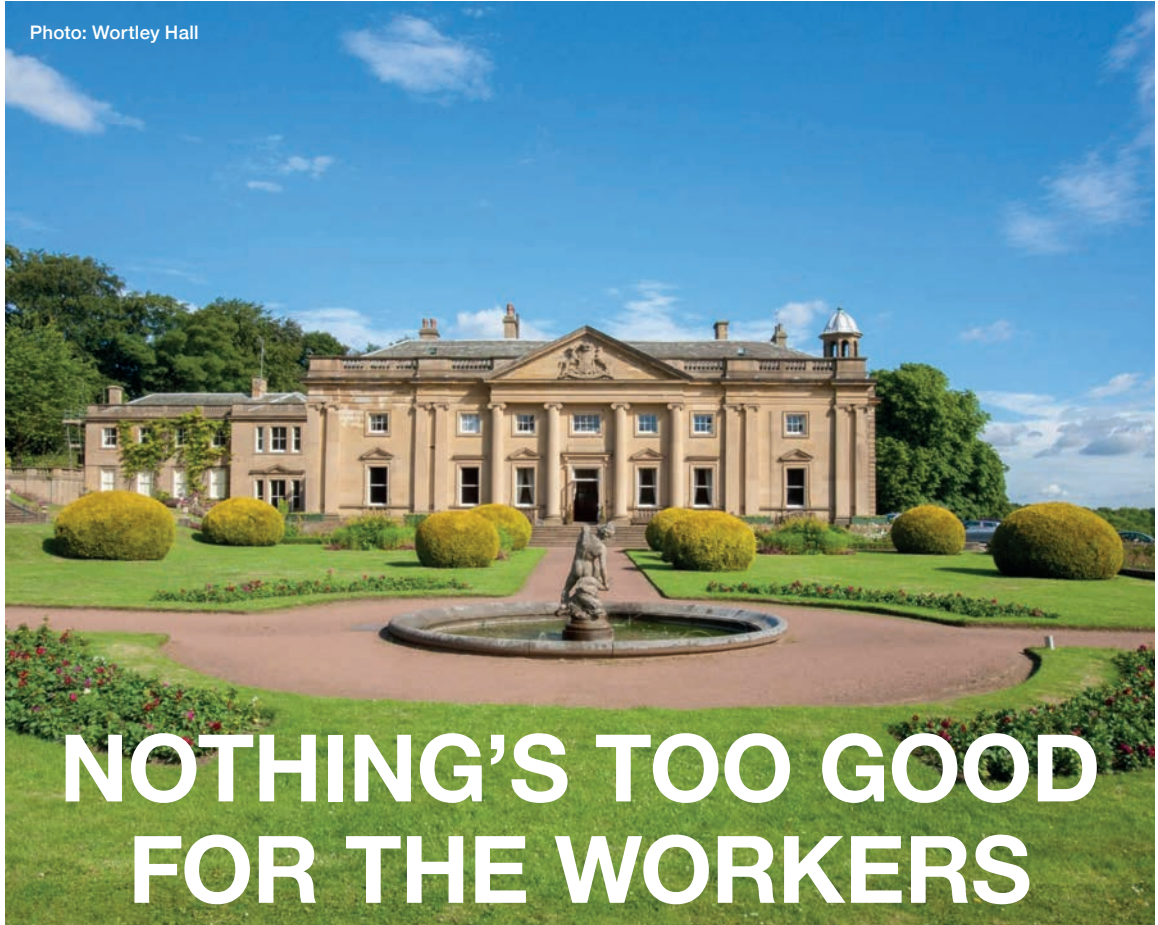


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Photo: Wortley Hall



# NOTHING'S TOO GOOD FOR THE WORKERS

Active! writer Helen Hague takes a look at the amazing Wortley Hall, 'The Workers' Stately Home' just south of Barnsley, which has been owned by the labour movement for the last 60 years

**T**ourists popping in for afternoon tea at Wortley Hall, set in 26 acres in the glorious South Yorkshire countryside, may well not realise that they are visiting a very special place in the history of organised labour.

It's a classy welcoming three-star hotel with formal gardens – a stunning backdrop for the many weddings now held there. It was built for aristocrats who got rich on the backs of miners who worked the coal seams nearby. Wortley Hall is the ancestral home of the

Earls of Wharnccliffe, lords of the manor of Wortley. But for many socialists and trade unionists it is cherished as 'The Workers' Stately Home'.

For more than 60 years Wortley Hall has been owned collectively by the working-class movement – with unions, socialist organisations and individuals as shareholders. Those owning one share have as much influence as those holding 50 times more. There's no role for speculators, hostile takeovers or venture capitalists. The management committee is elected from and by

shareholders. Profits are ploughed back into the business.

It is an extraordinary story of collective determination which has enriched trade union education and inspired activists for decades. The building was in a terrible state when the army left after the Second World War. In 1950, ex-miner Vin Williams – listed as a troublemaker by mine owners for his role in the general strike – shared a vision of the hall's future with other socialists and trade union activists.

Leasing the run-down building would enable



ONCE INSIDE WORTLEY HALL, IT'S HARD TO MISS THE LINK WITH UNIONS



Sylvia Pankhurst

local volunteers to get to work and create a home for trade union education and provide holidays for families in a place where hereditary privilege had been enshrined. Collective ownership would come next. Miners, railway workers, foundry workers, labourers and other volunteers who believed in the cause soon got to work. Wortley Hall opened as an education centre providing holidays for workers in 1951.

In 1959 the next phase of Vin Williams's vision was achieved. Wortley Hall was 'sold to the workers', to be managed by an elected committee, accountable to shareholders

Once inside Wortley Hall, it's hard to miss the link with unions - there's the Unite Ballroom, the FBU bar, and, of course, the UNISON room. All the bedroom wings are named after socialists - including Keir Hardie, George Lansbury Robert Owen and Wortley's own Vin Williams. All men - a point not missed by the many women who have honed their activism over the years at Wortley Hall. The garden room sponsored by the National Association of Women was a welcome sponsorship and renaming late last century. But it was clear to all that more needed to be done to celebrate trailblazing socialist women.

Shareholders Megan Dobney, former secretary of the South-East regional

TUC, and Philippa Clark, life-long trade union activist, are both members of the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee<sup>(1)</sup> - which successfully championed naming Wortley Hall's library after the pioneering socialist. A lecture exploring her legacy is held every August. The committee is also in the final stages of raising money for a statue of Sylvia Pankhurst to stand on Clerkenwell Green<sup>(2)</sup>. It has already been cast.

There are no shareholder dividends at Wortley - and lots of challenges keeping up repairs in such an historic listed building. Though, these days, shareholders get discounts when dining, drinking or booking rooms, as well as a chance to help shape policy.

The hall is steeped in Labour movement history - walls awash with pictures, photos and posters celebrating solidarity and socialism. Meals were provided for striking miners and their families in the 1984-85 pit strike. But Wortley Hall has a warm welcome for all and is very much open to mainstream tourists. - no union card necessary.

From its pioneering days when union activists slept in dormitories, much has changed - with ensuite facilities in all bedrooms and no communal showers. But change did not come that quickly. Kerry Baigent, now a UNISON regional manager in the South-West, remembers sleeping in a dorm and heading for the communal showers in the early nineties, when attending a Fire Brigades Union (FBU) school.

Together with Vicky Knight, now a regional official for UNISON in the North-West, Kerry led many FBU national schools for women earlier in the century. They were timed for the Easter holidays, with a free creche for children. Some have gone on to be firefighters.

Tourism, wedding parties and trade union activism often co-exist at Wortley Hall - take a weekend in mid-August this year. There was a big wedding in the grounds on Saturday afternoon, with guests celebrating through to the evening. Meanwhile, the annual Sylvia Pankhurst memorial lecture was taking place in the UNISON room - given by Rachel Holmes, author of a new acclaimed biography<sup>(3)</sup>

Then, on Sunday, local families flocked to the free annual South Yorkshire Festival sponsored in part by unions, for stalls, performances, speeches, fun and goody bags. Back in the UNISON room, there was a timely look at how tabloid union bashing is back bigtime as workers facing the escalating cost of living crisis are voting to strike.

Wortley Hall survived pandemic lockdowns - when weddings and union schools were cancelled and staff furloughed. The pits are long gone. Weddings are booming. The Workers' Stately Home is having to adapt. But the bedrock principles remain - with shareholders there to uphold them. □

## REFERENCES

1 [sylvia pankhurst.gn.apc.org](http://sylvia pankhurst.gn.apc.org)

2 @sylvia statue

3 Sylvia Pankhurst - Natural Born Rebel by Rachel Holmes



WORTLEY  
HALL  
HAS  
A WARM  
WELCOME  
FOR ALL





Photo: Vicky Matthers

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Karen Loughlin, Yorkshire and Humberside's formidable new regional secretary, doesn't take No for an answer. Active! editor **Barrie Clement** talks to the first woman in the post

For most people a refusal is just that – a refusal. UNISON's new regional secretary for Yorkshire and Humberside doesn't quite see it like that.

For Karen Loughlin, the first woman to occupy the top official's post in the region, a refusal is a challenge.

When she was employed by British Gas as a 22-year-old,

she lost out on promotion to a colleague, who was deemed to be 'more qualified' - but happened to be the daughter of a director.

Karen pointed out to management that her rival was not more qualified and told the young woman concerned that she should be 'ashamed' of taking the job just because of her dad's position. This was the catalyst to becoming a union

activist and then later a union employee.

Karen started her union career as an employee of Nalco, one of the predecessor unions of UNISON. She was told that admin staff didn't become full time officers of the union. "When I was told that, it made me want to do it all the more," she says. Suffice it to say, she became an organising assistant in the union and then



WE LIVE  
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## “ I’M VERY COMMITTED TO SOCIAL JUSTICE AND IMPROVING PEOPLE’S LIFE CHANCES

Campaigning for a well-funded care service is something that Karen is keen to continue in Yorkshire and Humberside having worked hard on the issue in Wales, where the Welsh Labour government has committed to developing a national care service.

Karen is aware that she will need all her determination in her new job, faced with a government that is tone deaf to the plight of the working poor; a government that is determined to impoverish UNISON members and eviscerate the services they provide.

“We live in a society where the rich are getting richer – a country where the wealthiest 10 per cent hold around half of all wealth, and we have a government which thinks that’s right.”

One of her main challenges is to convince members that their vote can make a difference. “I find it really difficult that in 2022 in one of the richest countries in the world people working full time are having to go to food banks and they know they’re going to be cold this winter.

“Others will struggle to keep their houses. Someone with a £100,000 mortgage is having to pay an extra £300 a month. That’s without having to pay all the other bills.”

And the government want to make it virtually impossible for workers to defend themselves. “Ministers have repeatedly promised action to weaken unions’ power.

“There is also a real threat that the government will rip up European Union regulations that protect workers’ rights, such as the limit on hours in the working week and the minimum number of holidays

“Some UNISON members can’t see a way out. But people have to understand they have political choices. They have to understand that they can make a difference in a general election. Part of my role is to persuade people that voting does make a difference.”

On a practical level, Karen believes that the union has to engage more with its members. “We have to get our profile out there,” she says.

“Lots of our members are working from home these days. We have to adapt ourselves to deal with that. They must be able to see our activists.

“With the best will in the world, people don’t want to hear from me. We want members to tell their stories. It has much more traction if it comes from them.

“The trade union movement is a social movement and we can make a difference. That’s how the government was persuaded to pay people during covid furloughs. It was through the TUC. If we act collectively we are a massive force to be reckoned with.”

Karen wants to create a new cadre of UNISON organisers made up of activists who may not have considered becoming full-time officials but have all the personal attributes to do so.

She believes care workers and community organisers, to name just two, could become excellent organisers. “They have amazing inter-personal skills,” she says. “They are really good at empowering people.”

Karen organised a ‘drop-in’ session recently at the union’s Leeds headquarters for those who are considering becoming organisers and intends to hold another one in the new year.

So if you ever thought of becoming an organiser, Karen wants to hear from you. □



a regional organiser when the union became UNISON.

That was in the North East. She came to Yorkshire and Humberside in 2018 to become a regional manager, moving to Wales in 2020 as regional secretary and then back to this region this summer. She will have worked for Nalگو and UNISON for 32 years this November.

Karen and her sister were brought up in the North East by a single mother who was something of a role model. Karen is motivated to fight for fairness and equality and has a great work ethic which she attributes to her mum who held down three jobs to make ends meet.

Karen’s mother is in a care home in the North East now, so coming back to Yorkshire and Humberside allows Karen to help look after her and spend more time with her. The new regional secretary says she is witnessing first hand the essential job care staff provide.

Barrie Clement





# ARRIBA!

Why not learn Spanish?  
... and avoid paying fancy  
tourist prices for paella!  
**Helen Hague** interviews  
Spanish-born Daniel De  
Arriba, UNISON language  
tutor and learning rep

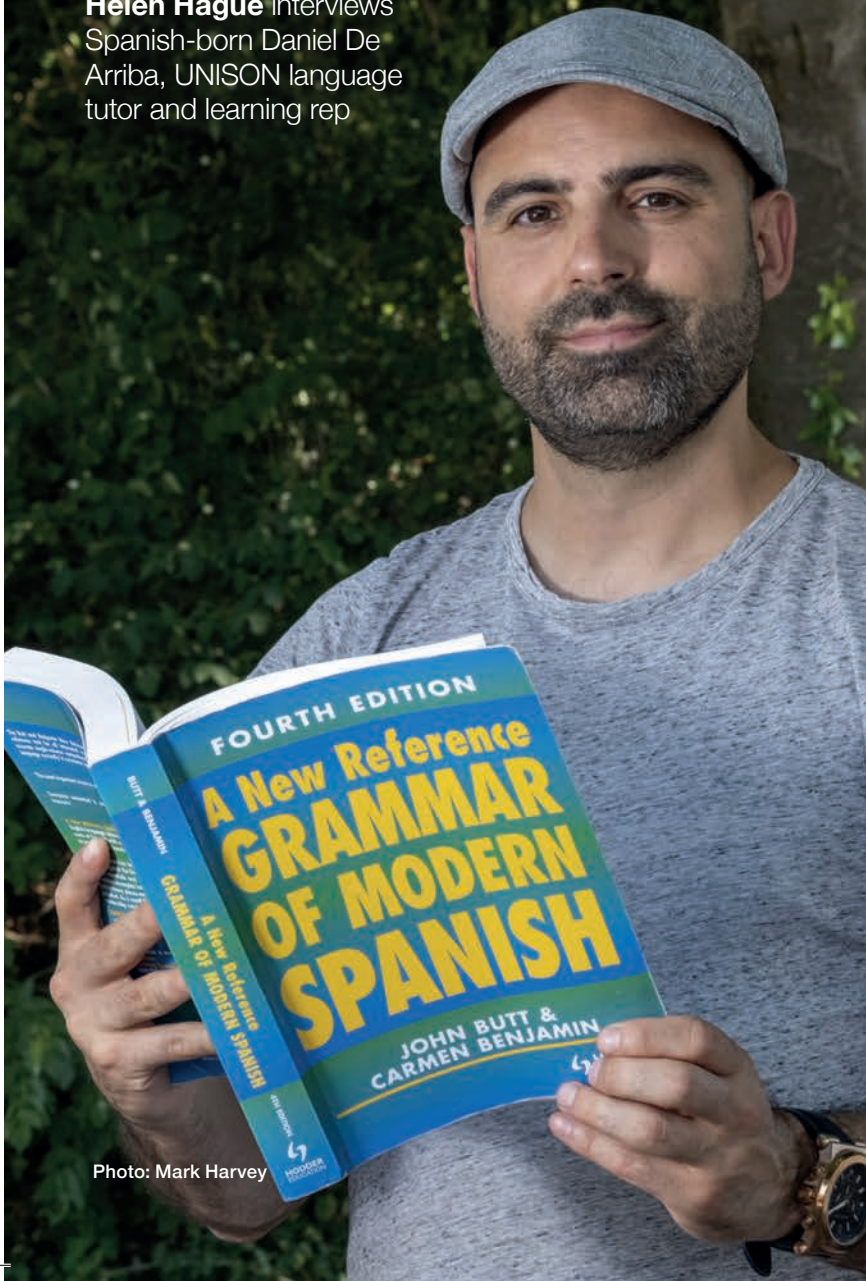


Photo: Mark Harvey

It's hardly surprising that teaching Spanish comes naturally to Spanish-born union learning rep Daniel De Arriba. He relishes his native language, enjoys teaching and has a deep belief that 'life-long learning' can help us all make the most of ourselves.

Dan, HR business partner at Shelter, will be leading on-line Spanish conversation sessions with UNISON members in Yorkshire and Humberside this autumn. And he is happy to admit he's 'enthused' at the prospect.

Dan, who until August worked at the charitable trust Barnsley Premier Leisure, has already held an online taster session on Spanish language and culture for union members during 'learning at work week' in the Spring. Another one, exploring cultural stereotypes, is planned.

The first session went down well - exploring how Spanish is a far stricter language than English. Words can only be pronounced one way. And if as a tourist, you pronounce paella sounding the 'lls', in restaurants you are likely 'to get charged twenty per cent more' in Spain.

"It's both a joke and not a joke," says Dan - underscoring how showing respect for other languages makes sense in so many ways. There are legions of British people who failed to learn languages at school who are keen to do so as they grow older. And though it's easier



to learn when young – it's never too late to start. And on-line learning can play a motivating role.

### IMPRESSIVE

Ten-year-old Dan didn't speak any English when he arrived in Peterborough with his parents from northern Spain in the mid-nineties. "I was completely clueless," he says. But not for long - thanks to an impressive English teacher who offered one-to-one support. Dan, keen to learn and adjust to his new home country, soon picked up the language, notching up a good set of GCSEs en route to a first degree in philosophy and economics at Sheffield University.

He's always shown a flair for teaching and supporting others – his first jobs on leaving university included co-ordinating sports in a primary school through a children's charity and supporting students adjusting to university. He is now a qualified mental health first aider and helps others through his human resources work. He also took a master's degree in human resources at Sheffield Hallam where he is an associate lecturer. And he enjoys teaching Spanish to bring others closer to his home country.

Dan knows that encouraging learning and development among the workforce should be a key strategy for both human resources departments and unions. So at Barnsley Premier Leisure, which runs the town's famous Metrodome sports and leisure complex, his twin

roles as HR professional and union learning rep helped spread the message and boost take-up.

The link-up with UNISON, a union Dan chose to join because of its track record on encouraging learning, has proved fruitful all round. Working closely with Rose Bent, UNISON's learning and development officer in Yorkshire and Humberside, Dan helped those employed by the charity get access to top-notch relevant courses – confidence- building, help with assertiveness, careers advice - as part of their personal development plan. By providing these courses, the union has raised its profile in the workforce.

Rose said as soon as she found out Dan taught Spanish she was "eager to put his talents to work for our education programme" – hence the well-received taster session and plans for conversational Spanish sessions. She adds that as a ULR in his workplace Dan "always wants to deliver courses that meet the needs of colleagues and staff".

### EMOTIONAL

From personal experience, Dan sees the power of learning as transformative: "Learning gives you power and choice". But he also knows not everyone finds it easy to get involved - "lots of the barriers to learning are emotional". So he reckons it is vital to make learning enjoyable, easily accessible and encourage those who may be reticent to embrace opportunities.

Dan is a great believer in diversity, difference and inclusion – in the workplace and beyond. He found it 'a curious experience' to be working in Hull straight after the Brexit vote, when it felt "like three out of four people voted leave so they might not want Europeans like me around".

He met his Chinese wife at a Salsa event in Sheffield – they now have a four-year-old son who starts school in the city in September. His dad is already encouraging him to speak Spanish and have 'a positive connection' with the heritage of both his parents – not to mention reap the benefits of being multi-lingual as he grows up.

### CONVERSATION

Though people acknowledge learning languages can open doors to new experiences, most Brits would accept we are way down the league when it comes to speaking them with confidence. Dan tells of Romanian people learning Spanish by watching South American soap operas. It is hard to imagine many British people doing the same, though changing the language on streaming platforms makes it easier.

UNISON members in Yorkshire and Humberside keen to learn or brush up on their Spanish should watch out for news of Dan's online Spanish conversation course soon. And you have been warned - just remember not to pronounce the "lls" in paella to avoid getting ripped off in Spain... □



LEARNING  
GIVES YOU  
POWER  
AND  
CHOICE



LOTS OF  
BARRIERS  
TO  
LEARNING  
ARE  
EMOTIONAL

# NOTHING TO BE MODEST ABOUT!



Photo: Vicky Matthers

Wakefield UNISON convenor Sam Greenwood fought long and hard to secure a bonus for adult social care workers out of a special government fund, but he doesn't like to shout about it, says **Ruth McGuire**

**B**y all accounts, 35-year-old Wakefield-based UNISON convenor and branch secretary Sam Greenwood, is a modest man. He shuns the limelight, or as he puts it: "I like to get things done without being seen." He describes himself as 'boring' but nothing could be further from the truth. This is because Sam has already achieved something that many people can only dream of doing – he has quite literally, travelled across the

world.

After finishing his 'A' levels and before embarking on the next major chapter of his life, Sam spent ten months as an 18-year-old, travelling.

The first stop on his global trip was Bangkok in Thailand and his last stop, the USA. In between, he visited Fiji, New Zealand and a few other countries. One of the main challenges he faced as a world traveller was communicating with the villagers, islanders and inhabitants of all the amazing places he visited.

He explains: "Back then, people didn't really use smart phones like they do now, but somehow you just rubbed along, pointing, grunting and using hand gestures to make yourself understood. Usually, there was someone around who spoke a little English who could help."

After his world travels, Sam settled down to life as a student at Hull University and studied for a degree in Philosophy and Politics and took a master's degree in social work.



I LIKE  
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BEING  
SEEN



His interest in politics started long before his degree studies. He explains: "I got interested in politics as a 14-year-old, round about the time of the Iraq war. I was politicised by that war and wanted to know why things were like they were in the world."

Sam's commitment to social justice and equality and his previous involvement with the students' union at university, probably made it inevitable that he would become a union activist. His achievement as a global traveller prepared him well for his current full-time role as a convenor, a role which involves working with union members, employers

and local councillors from a diverse range of backgrounds. In addition to his convenor role, Sam is also branch secretary at Wakefield.

He balances his UNISON roles with his family commitments. This includes working condensed hours over four days so that he can spend quality time being a father to a 'lively' two-year-old, who was one of the estimated 600,000 children born during lockdown.

Covid also had an impact on Sam's role as a convenor and in particular having to deal with the unique pressures faced by front line workers and employers in the adult social care sector. The combination of health risks due to Covid plus existing retention and recruitment issues hit the sector hard.

The Government response to this was to introduce the 'Workforce Recruitment and Retention fund'. The fund was set up in autumn 2021 to 'support local authorities to address adult social care workforce capacity pressures in their geographical area through recruitment and retention activity'. Sam and his fellow convenors at Wakefield, decided that the proportion of the fund allocated to the local authority in Wakefield, should be spent on carers within adult social care, who are among the lowest paid workers in the country.

"We knew how much money the local authority had been given, did our research and decided that the additional funding should go directly into carers' pockets," says Sam. It took weeks of research, dialogue with the local authority and persistent work with elected members of the council before Sam and his

colleagues were able to reach an agreement to pay carers directly from the fund.

At the time, around 1000 carers in the region were eligible to benefit from the fund which, when all the sums were done, worked out as a payout to each carer of £500. The payments applied to front line care workers such as those in care homes or as home care workers, working directly with service users.

Inevitably, there was some disquiet from other low paid workers outside adult social care, who did not receive any extra financial support. Sam admits to feeling frustrated at not being able to support more low paid workers. He says: "We wish we could have argued for extra funding for as many people as possible, but we were restricted to using the money for adult social care workers."

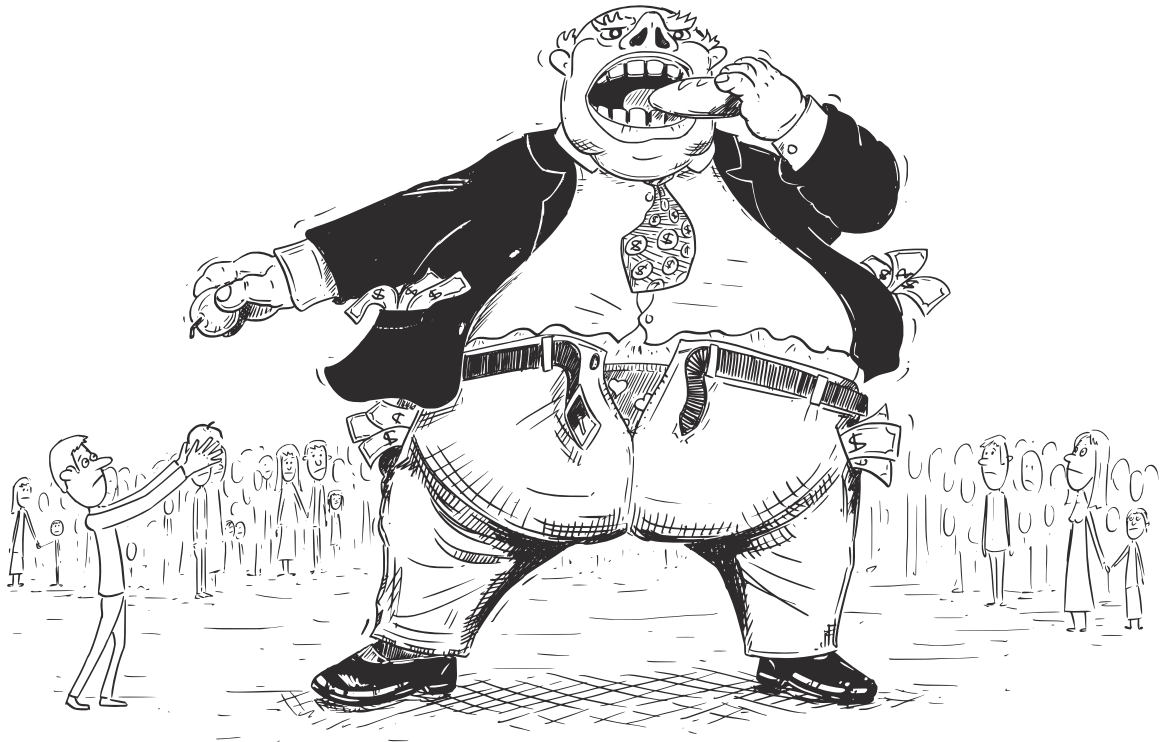
As for the impact of the funding on carers, Sam highlights some of the feedback he received from them: "For some, it meant they could treat their children to a little holiday. For others, it represented two weeks' wages, for some it paid for uniforms for the children and for others it meant they could catch up with paying bills."

Being able to offer financial support to some of the low paid workers in Wakefield, was a significant success for Sam and his fellow convenors. However, for some families, the significance of the extra financial support they received wasn't just about the money. It was about making memories for their children which like Sam's own memories of his world expedition, will last a lifetime. □



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# MAD, BAD, GREEDY

Millions of families are struggling to eat, people are dying of cold and the NHS is denied funding to survive the looming crisis. Active! columnist **Peter Carroll** vents his wrath

**T**he traditional way doctors check for signs of dementia is by asking patients to tell them who the prime minister is.

But the bewildering speed of changes at the top of the Tory Party means millions of us who are sound of mind would fail that test.

As one unelected idiot after another is installed in

Downing Street, it seems our already dysfunctional democracy has now collapsed entirely. We have all been disenfranchised by oligarchs.

The Tory party has long espoused the reverse Robin Hood economics of neoliberalism.

But in the past they at least made a token effort to disguise their intentions with nonsense about wealth

trickling down from the top to benefit everyone below. Just like a leaky septic tank.

Just to recap: Boris Jonson was convicted of holding law-breaking piss-ups in Number 10 as the bodies piled high during the pandemic.

So the Tories anointed Liz Truss who, with Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng, announced huge tax cuts for the rich,



**WORKERS  
ARE THERE  
TO PICK  
UP  
THE TAB  
FOR THE  
ORGY  
OF GREED**



sparking crippling rent and mortgage rises for millions of ordinary workers.

We are told that this proposal so spooked the masters of the universe in the City that the economy crashed and had to be bailed out with billions of our money from the Bank of England.

So she had to go. Step forward Rishi Sunak, one of the richest men in the country with at least £800 million stashed away in the vast mansion in Richmond he shares with his billionaire wife.

Just the type of man we need to break the bad news that the rest of us will have to suffer more savage cuts to our public services to pay for the greed of his class.

Massive gas and electricity bills, and rocketing inflation and interest rates are making people ill, and thousands of them will unquestionably die prematurely.

For years, the Tories have remained sneeringly unmoved by the plight of those who are struggling to feed their families from food banks.

Who can forget William Rees-Mogg smirking as he told a reporter that he thought the growth of food banks throughout Britain was 'actually rather uplifting'?

But even our rabid Tory national press is finding room for a few horrifying stories of poverty-stricken people starving themselves to feed their kids from their shrinking household budgets.

Terrifying reports of an expected surge in the number of people freezing to death this winter are now

widespread in the media.

And it looks like the trusty old list of Tory scapegoats has finally been exhausted.

Asylum seekers are always useful for whipping up racial hatred and diverting Johnson's 'herd' from the realities of late capitalism. But asylum seekers don't come round and cut your gas and electricity off, so it's a stretch to blame them.

What about the notoriously 'idle' British workers that senior Tories rail against? Surely these feather-bedded shirkers are behind this catastrophe?

Again, it's hard to make this one wash because virtually none of them work in the planet-destroying cartel these companies inhabit.

Workers are not responsible for authorising the burning of poisonous fossil fuels which threaten our very existence.

Workers are there to pick up the tab for the endless, obscene orgy of greed where these monsters indulge their every conceivable appetite without a care in (or for) the world.

And, tragically for all concerned, it is no longer feasible to point the finger of blame at that once reliable scapegoat, the Labour party.

We have been under the Tory yoke for far too long for that to hold any water at all (just like the privatised racketeers responsible for the leaks in our water supplies - and for pumping trillions of gallons of human excrement into our rivers every year).

In the midst of all this horror, I was further shocked to awake to the

news that Bradford, the place where I live and was born and bred, was allegedly the most violent city in Europe.

That's right. The most violent city, not in Yorkshire, not in the country, but in the whole of Europe!

It turns out a 'controversial' Serbia-based crowd-sourced data base called Numbeo has concluded that Bradford has the continent's highest crime rate and is more dangerous even than war-torn Ukraine.

West Yorkshire Police were quick to respond, challenging the validity of the firm's evidence and pointing to recent significant reductions in violent crime and burglary.

Predictably, the messages poured in blaming the multi-cultural nature of the city and its large Asian population for drug dealing, child grooming and gun and knife crime.

Violence happens everywhere and always has.

It is invariably linked to poverty, lack of investment, criminally underfunded public services and the despair this creates.

But the relentless class war waged by the Tories and their paymasters needs whipping boys.

The world has been run for 40 years by winner takes all neo-liberal zealots inflicting economic violence on us all.

So in one of the wealthiest countries in human history, millions of families are struggling to eat, people are dying of cold and the NHS is denied funding to survive the looming crisis.

The super-rich are 'taking it all'. We must unite to take it back. □



IT IS NO LONGER FEASIBLE TO POINT THE FINGER OF BLAME AT THE LABOUR PARTY



# PAUL ROUTLEDGE

MIRROR POLITICAL COLUMNIST

## FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART...

Mirror journalist **Paul Routledge** has always campaigned long and hard for our NHS, but now he's got a very personal reason for doing so. Last May he suffered a catastrophic rupture of the body's most important blood vessel and was brought back from the brink of death by Leeds General Infirmary

**L**ittle did I know when I wrote about the critical state of the health service in the last Active! that I would soon have my own personal NHS crisis.

In mid-May, I collapsed with an aortic dissection – basically a rupture of the most important blood vessel. My life was saved by surgeons, nurses and support staff at Leeds General Infirmary in a ten-hour, all-night operation.

Thanks to them, I am still here to tell the tale. I can't thank them enough, but I'll try to do so here. Thank you from the bottom of my still-beating heart.

This near-death experience reinforces my view that the NHS has to be the number one priority of the new government.

Health chiefs have warned the new prime minister that they need at least an extra £4 billion in an emergency budget to stave off job losses and worse medical services.

And that's before the winter of even higher energy prices and rising inflation kicks in. Some trusts have secured long-term deals, locking them into agreed rates but for others the

cost hikes are epic.

Leeds Teaching Hospitals told the British Medical Journal it expects to pay an extra £2 million a month for gas and electricity in January and February 2023, compared with the first two months this year. Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust calculates its total energy bill for 2022/23 to be almost 130 per cent higher than last year.

"This isn't an abstract problem," warns Rory Deighton, senior acute lead at the NHS Confederation. "The gap in funding from rising inflation will either have to be made up by fewer staff being employed, longer waiting times or other areas of patient care being cut back."

It comes right home when you've been in Intensive Care. And not just me. For the last year our great-granddaughter, Robyn, aged two, has been treated for cancer in the children's department of the same hospital that saved my life.

That's double thanks, NHS people.

### WIGAN THE WINNER?

The Rugby League World Cup is coming to England, in fact to

a stadium near you. The semi-final is due to be staged at Elland Road on November 11, and England v Greece (didn't know they played the game!) at Bramall Lane at the end of October.

One thing that fans will not be able to see is the Rugby League Museum, that should have been opening in the place where the sport was founded in 1895 – Huddersfield's iconic (and currently closed) George Hotel.

Owners Kirklees council got cold feet on the project, and it could now go to Wigan. Really! That would be a let-down.

### HARRY THE HERO

The sudden death, at only 71, of TV legend Harry Gration, shook the county. Fellow Look North presenter Amy Garcia welled up as she announced his passing live on the evening news.

I can reveal that she had been told some hours before, but her emotion was genuine. Harry was much loved, and did great work for charity.

He was sometimes called Mr Yorkshire, a title that might be disputed by fellow-legend 87-year-old Sir Michael Parkinson.



MY LIFE WAS SAVED BY SURGEONS, NURSES AND SUPPORT STAFF



The difference is Harry lived here, like what I still do.

### KEEPING IT REAL

At the time, it was a stunning achievement, but a controversial one. Jack Jones, legendary boss of the Transport and General Workers' Union and undisputed leader of the labour movement, negotiated a £6 a week across the board pay rise for the entire nation.

Nobody was to get more, nobody got less. For most members of the National Union of Public Employees, forerunner of UNISON, it was the largest percentage wage increase they'd ever had.

Craft unions grumbled, because a flat-rate rise cut into their differentials. But they all complied with this key plank of Harold Wilson's government anti-inflation incomes policy.

Naturally, the well-off found ways to get round the limit. City slickers paid themselves in shares, or works of arts, even vintage wines. But by and large, the policy worked, and in many ways it foreshadowed the rise of Labour and TUC plans for a national minimum wage, pioneered by UNISON's first general secretary, Rodney Bickerstaffe.

The NMW now stands at £9.50, with lower rates for those under 23. TUC has proposed that it should rise 'as soon as possible' to £15 an hour for all workers regardless of age, declaring "It's time the UK led the world on pay".

So, would we ever go back to national pay restraint? Certainly not under a Tory government obsessed with 'the free market'. In any case, unions would tell them where to put it. These days profits are pushing inflation, certainly not wages.

### SPEAKS FOR ITSELF

Does Yorkshire really need a tourism organisation to attract visitors?

The 'broad acres' are a magnet for millions of holidaymakers every year, especially since the post-pandemic boom in staycations.

The collapse into heavy debt of public/private Welcome to Yorkshire, once headed by Sir Gary Verity (remember him?) suggests to me the county can get by without such an organisation.

The Dales, the castles and abbeys, the country towns, the great cities, the Riviera resorts of Whitby, Scarborough, Filey and Bridlington, the heritage railways and the nature reserves all virtually sell themselves.

On a limited budget Bradford has won the race to become UK City of Culture for 2025, an accolade richly deserved. The city has had a bad Press lately, but now has an opportunity to showcase its marvellous cultural diversity, its rich industrial and political history, and its green spaces.

There nowt wrong with Bradford. My parents lived there for years, on the top in Wrose. Bloody cold in winter, mind you.

### MARVELLOUS PEOPLE

In a brief stay at Airedale hospital, I overheard nurses talking about 'the dignity cupboard.'

Some patients come in without clothes, or relatives take them away, and when they come up for discharge, they have nothing to wear.

So they're temporarily kitted out from a kind of clothes bank. They think of everything, these marvellous people.

### DANUM-ON-THE-DON

Doncaster becomes a city from November 1. Official, by decree of Her Majesty's Crown Office.

But what to call it? Apparently it had to have a new name, and the council suggested two alternatives: City of Doncaster or Doncaster City.

The first was a statement of the obvious, and the second suggested a football team to rival the Rovers. In an on-line poll, 60 per cent of voters preferred "City of, so that's what it will be.

Of course, they could have gone back to the original Roman name of Danum, like the town's (sorry, city's) historic hotel. Or Danum-on-the-Don.

### WHERE NOW?

Two sides of England's traditional hospitality towards migrants have been on show in a turbulent year in our region.

Yorkshire families welcomed 3,500 refugees, mainly women and children, from war-torn Ukraine. Their open-hearted generosity was praised by the Refugee Council as 'truly inspiring.'

But government proposals for an asylum seekers' accommodation centre in a disused housing estate at RAF Linton-on-Ouse in North Yorkshire met with a storm of opposition from local people.

They complained about the lack of consultation, and voiced security fears about the presence of up to 1,500 single men who entered the UK illegally across the Channel.

They were also worried about the impact that such a development would have on house prices, but they didn't make much of that. In public, at any rate.

After heavy adverse publicity, local Tory MPs joined the opposition, and the Home Office abandoned the idea. So, where will these hapless migrants go now? One possibility is Huddersfield - where residents are also kicking up a stink. □

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





# FIRED FOR BEING ILL

A Sheffield lab technician has won substantial compensation after being sacked for contracting an illness - caused by her employer's breach of health and safety law

A lab technician, who was sacked by her school on the grounds of ill health after developing asthma, has received five-figure compensation thanks to the support of UNISON and Thompsons Solicitors.

The 63-year-old UNISON member developed asthma while working in a science department of a school in Rotherham. Her employer paid out after admitting liability for failing to comply with Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) regulations.

She began to notice problems with the air quality and ventilation in a new room at the school's science department in 2004.

Noxious fumes would regularly form a fog during her workday. These fumes were later identified as the result of hydrochloric acid, sodium hydroxide, nitric acid and ammonium chloride not being stored in a sealed chemical cupboard.

These chemicals are classed as substances that can cause harm to health and must meet COSHH 2002 regulations - something the school failed to do.

Exposure to these irritants has

severely affected her health, yet her former employer did not accept that they directly contributed to her asthma diagnosis.

The experience has left her jobless after years of loyal service. She was dismissed in November 2018 - something she's still struggling to come to terms with almost four years later.

She said: "Despite flagging up the unsafe work environment on numerous occasions with senior leadership at the school, my warnings fell on deaf ears. The hazardous working conditions I was forced to work in ultimately cost me my job.

"It's disappointing that my employer did not address the issues raised when I made them aware and only sought to overhaul their processes - relating to toxic chemicals - after I was dismissed on 'ill health' grounds.

"I'm hoping that securing a successful outcome will encourage others who feel they are working in unsafe environments to make a stand through their trade union, in order to get compensation for their losses, like I did."

Thompson's argued that the client would never have become ill,

had the school abided by the health and safety regulations.

Alison Gregory, of Thompsons Solicitors, said: "Although we are pleased to secure this settlement for our client, it's incredibly frustrating that it comes at such a huge cost for our client, who has lost her much-loved job through no fault of her own.

"The defendants failed in numerous ways, both in assessing the risks and then preventing or adequately controlling the hazardous exposure that followed.

"The school also neglected to provide and maintain personal protective equipment (PPE) and didn't monitor the exposure that was taking place in the science department. They offered neither a safe place nor a safe system of work.

"No employee should be made to work in environments that don't meet health and safety standards. We hope she can now start to move on with her life after what has been a very stressful time for her and her family."

To get help speak to your UNISON rep or visit [www.thompsonstradeunion.law](http://www.thompsonstradeunion.law). □

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