



THE VOICE OF UNISON NORTHERN REGION AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Northern Focus

Issue 1, Tuesday 18th June 2019

Welcome to Conference 2019

The impact of the Government's social and economic austerity measures continues to have significant consequences for public service delivery across the Region. The disastrous Tory policies of austerity which are about making some of the most vulnerable people pay for an economic crisis not of their making have been exposed as not delivering for the majority of people. The Labour Party manifesto which is a vision to deliver opportunity and equality is one which UNISON absolutely supports. In the Northern Region we have felt the impact of Tory policies in our workplaces and communities acutely and have consistently campaigned for alternative policies which have been soundly supported across the Region. We must use our strong relationship with the Labour Party to ensure we get the best deal for our members and public services. We must use this to recruit to our union, and to mobilise more of our members into activity.

Regional Committee, Regional Council and Labour Link are working together to strengthen the Region's political organising agenda in the current context. The industrial and political work are now aligned into a comprehensive political organising strategy. We continue to work well with Northern Group of Labour MPs, Councillors and MEPs to not only promote UNISON's manifesto, but also to influence Regional campaigning. The local elections across the Region in May has changed the political map, particularly in Tees Valley, however it was positive that in North of Tyne the Labour candidate was elected as Mayor.

There has been a crisis in all our public services which under the Tories have been subjected to funding cuts since 2010 and this will now change. We have a real opportunity to be directly involved in developing and delivery public services for the future.

Northern Region delegates, have a good record of making valuable and informed contributions to debates as the Region and Branches have been at the forefront of the campaign in workplaces and communities to defend public services. Delegates and their Branches will also have contributions to make on learning, health and safety, equalities and other debates where the experience of Branches and delegates can provide valuable information and ideas.

A key debate at this year's Conference, in which the Region will play a key role, is about growing the union. As part of the debate we will focus on the huge successes from the whole union recruitment initiatives during November and May. The Tory's Trade Union Act has created a great deal of uncertainty around the future of our political fund which threatens to reduce radically the resource we can use to ensure our members' voices are heard on the political stage. Again this is set to be a significant debate incorporating the Region's own motion calling for a campaign to secure the repeal of the Act. The Region will also have a direct interest in motions outlining attacks on democracy and austerity and our local communities; and similarly international work with particular debates on Colombia, the Middle East and Palestine.

UNISON Northern is the leading union in the Northern Region and has a high and influential profile within the national union. Branches and delegates have an opportunity to participate in debates and bring their experiences to the floor of Conference to inform and determine UNISON policies.

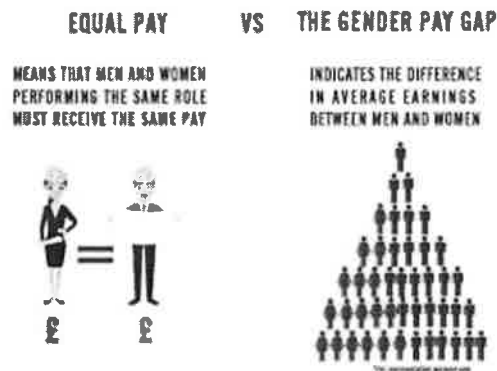
We are sure UNISON Northern delegates will play a full and active role – participating in debates, attending fringe meetings and writing for the Regional newsletter and of course enjoying the social life! If there is anything you are unsure about please just ask Clare, Nicky or Linda.

Clare Williams
Regional Secretary

Nicky Ramanandi & Linda Hobson
Regional Delegates

Motion 22: Smashing the gender pay gap

49 years after the equal pay act and in the second year of gender pay gap reporting, why is this still an issue? Surely the equal pay act should have gone some way to reducing this issue?- you'd have thought. But industry, companies, and society continue to be statistically more likely to promote a man over a woman, and statistically are more likely to have men in senior positions. Equal pay is not the same as gender pay gap. Equal pay essentially means the same money for the same job (or a job of equal value) regardless of your gender- gender pay gap is the earnings difference between the male and female workforce.



So what can you do to tackle this? First job - support the motion and take part in the debate, secondly, acknowledge that this isn't a debate only for women to take part in.

Gender pay gap reporting is only compulsory for organisations with 250 or more employees, as the motion highlights we should be pushing for this to be reduced to 50 employees. Still a significant number of staff! Take the care sector for example, largely small employers, with a large low paid female workforce, not in senior positions, our local authorities commission many of these services, we should therefore be pushing them to engage in productive conversations and support these employers to see how they can reduce the pay gap especially at the top. It's not enough to have the employers reporting, they need to be demonstrating clear ways of reducing the gap. As the motion also highlights there is currently limited repercussion for non compliance, we need real penalties.

In the northern region lots of you are already holding your employers to account, but can your conversations go any deeper? What else can you do? Well, as the motion highlights continue speaking to your employers and ask them what steps are they taking in recruitment and selection practices? What aspirational messages are given to their female employees? What learning and development opportunities are available to women in their organisation? Are they family friendly with a good work life balance ethos so women can be confident they won't be judged when applying for senior positions?

Support the motion, and don't just leave it there, let's be proactive and be the leading region as we always are. Take the actions back to your branches, share good practice with each other and for those of you who are Labour Party members, take the issue to your CLP's and raise with your MP's.

Linda Hobson



Composite E - The Housing Crisis

The UK faces a desperate housing crisis, with an estimated total of at least 340,000 homes per year needing to be built. Of that figure at least 100,000 need to be good quality social rented homes. This housing shortage has led to spiralling rents and house prices across the nation causing an affordability crisis – especially for young people and families on low to middle incomes who struggle to afford to rent or buy a decent home.

This Composite includes a number of key motions and amendments on housing that highlight the need to address the additional demand and to campaign for local authorities to reclaim their vital role in building affordable housing.

In particular, the composite calls on the NEC to lobby the Government and devolved administrations to give councils increased financial flexibilities to enable them to build more social homes. Establish a new definition of “affordable housing” linked to income not market prices. Reform the land market to make it cheaper and easier for authorities to build new homes. Set up a “Homebuilding Capacity Fund” to help councils build capacity to deliver a new generation of council homes. Introduce stronger measures to regulate the private rented sector, including indefinite tenancies, a system of rent caps to limit rent increase and increased rights and protections for private renters to improve standards and affordability in private renting as Scotland has done. And finally call for an end the right to buy scheme as soon as possible.

The government desperately need to take urgent action to address these issues and this composite ensure that UNISON is taking a lead role in campaigning for practical measures to be implemented to ensure demand for affordable housing is met.

Nicky Ramanandi



Composite A - Menopause in the Workplace

It is encouraging to see the menopause is now a serious issue enough to make it onto the Conference Agenda.

But two years ago, the menopause hit me like a train crash. Hot flushes, anxiety attacks, foggy mind and erratic behaviour. It made me think that if I am feeling this way the other women in the Council must be feeling the same.

I launched my ‘tropical heatwave’ campaign. Taking roadshows all across the city. We had a lecturer from a local college who specialised in the menopause and she presented a fantastic session, but I asked her to make it funny, and light hearted. It was a fantastic campaign. Women opened up with their personal stories. But more importantly it gave me the insight of what I needed to do in the workplace.

I aimed to:

- Work with personnel to create a policy not unlike the maternity policy.
- Ensure we have menopause champions, and we get them trained to recognise the signs.

I am delighted to say this policy has been implemented in two organisations. I am UNISON’s Sunderland Champion. I see immediately what the signs are and act on them. I have a little system where my members ring me if they need fans for hot flushes. But more importantly, I can stop capability, disciplinary or sickness sanctions in their tracks using my policy.

Diane Peacock



Composite C - Tackling stress and bullying and harassment

We all understand the stress that many of us face day in and day out. The 2018 TUC Survey of safety reps confirmed that stress and bullying/harassment and overwork are the biggest three health and safety concerns.

We know that staff working in public services have faced severe cuts which has meant hundreds of thousands of jobs gone. The staff who have managed to keep their jobs are overworked and under pressure.

This Tory Government likes to refer to health and safety issues which include areas such as unreasonable workloads as being a burden. We can tell you the only burden from their policies is on over-worked and stressed public sector workers.



As this composite highlights we know the main causes of stress at work which include:

- Workload demands
- Lack of support from management
- Lack of control in the way we do our work

In the Northern Region where the Government's austerity policies have resulted in massive local government job losses, we have prioritised looking at stress and harassment in the workplace. Our Regional Health and Safety Committee took a lead and developed a stress survey project which has brought together branches and employers to undertake detailed work to find out from staff what the main stress area they are facing, and then working with employers to put appropriate responses and support into place.



Branches have been able to use this to go around workplaces and talk to staff about the issues which are affecting them every day, and to show that UNISON is the trade union that wants to hear from members and to find positive solutions. We are already seeing positive results from this work with stress at work being reduced, sickness rates being reduced and members feeling more supported by managers.

We have also started to embed this work as part of our retention, recruitment and organising work. We believe that it is good to share good practice and are keen to see the stress project taken forward across the union.

We understand tackling stress in the workplace is a long-term campaign and that branches will need to have appropriate support to increase the number of activists who can be supported to take this work forward.

We therefore are asking for you to support this and ask Conference to:

- Ask regions to fully back this work including providing training
- Ask branches to consider leading on this development in their area, electing a branch project lead and discussing it with employers
- Continue to lobby employers and the health and safety executive for much clearer guidance and stronger enforcement action
- Campaign to re-establish illness from work related stress as being registered as an industrial injury

Nicky Ramanandi & Linda Hobson

Justice for the Windrush Generation

Between 1942 – 1971 workers from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and other islands came to the UK following an invitation from the Government in a response to post war labour shortages.

Entry ended in 1971 but those already living here were given indefinite leave to remain. The way the Windrush generation have been treated is appalling and disgraceful, with an approach of deport first appeal later, many citizens who had every right to remain have been cruelly deported to countries that they had left many years ago.

And of those who remained often children of the Windrush era unable to prove their right to live in the country that they had lived in for years, many people have lost their jobs or the right to access the NHS.

A policy introduced in 2014 by May created a hostile environment which has meant that if you can't prove you are British then you are an illegal immigrant. One story which is replicated many times is that of a man who arrived when he was nine with his parents and has lived in the UK for more than 50 years, thinking correctly he was British, it was only when the policy brought in by May was introduced that a query was raised regarding his status – he lost his job and as he describes, 'his worth'. This policy and their approach a clear example of what the Tories are really about.

This is the first debate at Conference and highlights what a critical issue it is. Please be in the hall to support this Composite.

Nicky Ramanandi

Motion 29 Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships can be an important route into employment for individuals while also addressing the numerous skills gaps in many workplaces. However as motion 29 points out, in the current economic and political climate they are also sometimes used by employers as a tool to exploit apprentices using them as a form of cheap labour, replacing establishment posts and without meaningful training being provided. Getting employers to sign up to UNISON's Apprenticeship Charter is one way to ensure that the employers we work with are using apprenticeships appropriately and apprentices have the protection they need and the chance of a "proper" job at the end of the scheme. Although getting employers to sign up to the Charter is a good first step the best way to ensure apprentices are protected in the workplace is to recruit and organise them.

In NTW Health branch activists noticed that when attending induction events for apprentices that a lot of the younger apprentices in particular didn't know about Trade Unions or the importance of joining one. This led to a conversation with the Trust about UNISON working with them to help deliver some of the 20% off the job training that they need to provide. This then gave us the opportunity to invite all of the apprentices to the regional office for a mixture of work related training such as CV writing and time management and political education around Trade Union history and protecting public services. This approach both strengthened the relationship between the Trust and the branch as we were helping them out with their training needs but also gave us a level of access to the apprentices that we had not had before.

We were then able to not only recruit the apprentices as UNISON members but the branch also have two new activists from the project who are both attending NDC for the first time this year. Apprenticeships can be a wonderful opportunity for people who are just starting out in their careers or looking for a change in direction but they can also be a great opportunity for us to work with employers to provide joint training events that benefit everyone. The employer has some of the training needs looked after, the apprentices get a level of political education that they wouldn't receive otherwise and we get new members and activists who understand the importance of Trade Unions and in looking out for each other in the workplace.
Tanya Pretswell, NTW

This year's Regional Social will be happening on:

Thursday 20th June
From 7.30 pm

At REVOLUTION

Atlantic Pavilion, Albert Dock L3 4AE

It's an opportunity for Northern Delegates to get together informally for a drink and a bite to eat from the buffet. With a DJ playing some tunes it will be a relaxing and enjoyable evening and we hope you can join us.

If any delegate requires a copy of the Regional Newssheet in an alternative format please contact Allison Jackson

On The Fringe...

Lunchtime: 12.45—1.45

**Solidarity with Turkey:
Defending rights, democracy
and decent work
Room 13**

**Empowering members for the
changing workplace
Hall 1C**

**Case Management system for
Branches - at last!!
Hall 2F**

Evening: 5.15—6.15


**What next for social care?
Hall 2F**

**UNISON's campaigns for
women and pensions
Hall 2N**

**Cuba: 60 years of revolution,
60 years of blockade.
Solidarity against Trump
sanctions and intervention
Hall 1B**

Justice for Colombia would like to invite all NDC delegates from UNISON Northern to our upcoming event in solidarity with Colombia tonight at 7.30 pm in Liverpool.

This public event is co-organised by UNISON Northwest and JFC and is open to all. NDC delegates are welcome to bring friends, colleagues and comrades.



*Solidarity with
Human Rights and Peace
in Colombia*

Tuesday 18 June, 7.30pm
The Casa
29 Hope Street
Liverpool L1 9BQ

Join Justice for Colombia (JFC) and UNISON Northwest for an evening of conversation, film and music in solidarity with human rights, social justice and peace in Colombia.

Colombia signed an historic peace agreement in 2016 but communities remain heavily affected by political violence, human rights abuses and right-wing government policies. With the peace process on the brink, solidarity with Colombia has never been more crucial.

Justice for Colombia
UNISON
The public service union

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www.justiceforcolombia.org

Social Media

If you are on social media don't forget to tag us in or WhatsApp our Comms Team with your pics and a caption so we can post from the Region.



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WhatsApp

Your Newsheet Needs

You're here at Conference! Is it your first time? Are you speaking in a debate? Got something to say about your time in Liverpool? Let us know your thoughts, opinions and views through our Regional newsletter.

**See Allison in the Newsheet Room (Hall 2E) or e-mail her
a.jackson2@unison.co.uk**

You!!

