

Northern Focus

Issue 2, Wednesday 19th June 2019

General Secretary's Address

Dave Prentis had a simple message for his speech at this year's National Delegate Conference: one of solidarity. Solidarity with our union, in our internationalism and in wider class struggle.

The General Secretary began by welcoming delegates to our host city. He described Liverpool as a city of humour, culture and music before reflecting on the city's proud history of trade union struggles. Dave then spoke of the Hillsborough campaigners and vowed "our union will remain in solidarity until there is justice for the 96". Similarly, he committed UNISON to stand with the Grenfell campaigners so that what happened in that tower block never happens again.



Dave then spoke of UNISON's internationalism in that our solidarity has no borders. He listed our partnerships with trade unionists across each and every continent, making special mention of jailed activists in Colombia and Turkey and renewed the union's commitment to solidarity with Palestine.

Closer to home, the General Secretary spoke of the battle against the far right we're currently facing in our country. UNISON will and always has been on the front line of this fight but "Brexit has unleashed the stench of racism". He asked members to fight on the streets and in workplaces in defeating narrow-minded nationalism and reflected on UNISON's previous campaigning against the EDL and Nick Griffin. Dave listed all the groups which UNISON works with, including Show Racism the Red Card and Hope not Hate, and put out the call to "put the racists back in the gutter where they belong."

Moving onto the biggest issue facing our country, the General Secretary spoke of the Brexit mayhem and the demise it has caused in our politics. Despite this, Dave ensured our Northern Ireland comrades that UNISON would remain in solidarity; campaigning for no hard border and highlighting the paramount importance of the Peace Agreement. He further renewed the union's commitment for a people's vote so that the decision can be given back to the people it belongs to.

There were clear demands of the Labour Party; all privatisations ended immediately and all services brought back in-house if and when they win a General Election. Although he warned that "divided parties do not win elections."

Rounding off, Dave spoke of the solidarity within our union. He described UNISON members as compassionate, caring and kind whilst some are still having to manage their own crisis at home. To a cheering floor, the names of branches involved in industrial action over the last year were shouted out and the General Secretary was joined at the rostrum for a fitting chorus of 'You'll never walk alone'

Luke Holiday, North Tyneside LG

Resourcing the Union

This morning will see Conference debating Motion 126 – Resourcing our Branches – A UNISON Priority.

This is likely to be one of the big motions of the week, but hopefully a bit less contentious than some of the finance motions we have seen for the past few years.

The motion has been submitted jointly by the NEC, who supported the motion unanimously and Manchester and West Sussex Branches. So what does the motion do and how is it different to the current system for funding branches?

The motion provides for a funding uplift for branches with reserves below £16 per member. **AND** to recognise the levels of fragmentation in many branches there are further percentage funding uplifts available dependant on the number of employers a branch organises across. These fund uplifts are capped once branch reserves reach £16 per member, with the aim of achieving greater equity across branches.

No branch will face a financial detriment – for branches with reserves over £16 they will continue to be funded on the same basis as they are now. But the motion does more than that. The current uplifts system is not the long term solution for branches and nor is the uplift system that is proposed in the motion.

So, perhaps more importantly, are the proposals to resolve the Branch Resources Review. To start to really debate and bring forward some long term proposals to NDC 2021 which will address the funding issues some branches are facing. And, just maybe, be able to put this review to bed!! The reality is that the bureaucracy of administering the current branch uplifts, coupled with the Conference deadlock we have faced since 2016 has meant that the BRR has not been able to conclude the review.

Hopefully, by streamlining/automating the process, making the uplifts support more generous and establishing a broader working group – 12 Regional reps and 12 NEC members – we can finally resolve this issue for the long and short term.

However, the NEC is not supporting amendment 126.1 and this is for one compelling reason. The motion proposes a review group which would include a representative from each Region, who would be the voice of the branches in their Region. It is not possible to include all 800+ branches in the review, so we feel this is the best way to give them a voice. Branches, after all, will be the recipients of the new scheme, so their voice is vital.

The other half of the review group will be drawn from the NEC. We, of course, will be responsible for paying for any new funding scheme that is agreed!

We felt the decision making and development of a new branch funding proposals to these two parties, the recipients and the administrators. At the same time, we recognise that SOGs need to have their voice heard in the review. SOGs are key stakeholders and it is vitally important that they are fully involved in any consultation which Motion 126 already provides for.

Furthermore, the NEC has a duty to ensure we are achieving proportionality and fair representation in all the work we do – this means that when establishing our reps on this and any group, we need to give representation across the whole of the union. This means we will have to include members from different service groups, regions, SOGs and young members, as well as the wide and varied political voices across the union. In this way we feel we can meet the aims of the NDMC, while retaining membership of the working group to the two groups already established in the main motion.

Finally, amendment 126.2 is a helpful amendment which explicitly sets out what was only implied in the original motion, regarding regional pools.

It is so important that NDC passes this motion so that we can shift the focus of our Conference back to where it should be – opposing the Tories and fighting on behalf of our members.

Josie Bird, NEC

Growing the Union

You heard from the President yesterday that not only are we officially the biggest trade union, we are still growing. 15000 new members recruited during our "Going for Growth" campaign last month. We are a trade union that continues to deliver for our members, a successful union with equality at the heart of everything we do. And in the Northern Region we were the best recruiting region in May and that's thanks to all of you and the partnership working between branches and regional staff.

Equality is always central to everything we do, never an afterthought, whether it be through our self organisation or our outsourced and growing private sector, we ensure equality is kept high on every agenda.

The start of conference saw motions on the Windrush, menopause, apprenticeships and young members dominate the agenda, quite rightly so. UNISON is proud of its equalities agenda and in particular fighting and challenging the dangers of the far right. We are currently seeing a rise in far right activity and it playing into our mainstream media, social media and politics. Yesterday saw two teenagers jailed over terror offences. Let's be clear, these teenagers were neo-Nazis who stated that Prince Harry should be shot for marrying Megan Markle. Far from being just "keyboard warriors" they were part of an organisation intent on promoting terrorist attacks, targeting non-white and Jewish people and encourage acts of violence against members of the public. We have Donald Trump in the Whitehouse and the potential of Boris Johnson in Number 10 and the rise of Farage and his Brexit Party showing how fragmented our politics are at the moment.

UNISON reps within the workplace are at the forefront of our growth in membership. Trade unionism shows people that we have far more in common than that which divides us, as the late Jo Cox said. People want to be part of an organisation that fights for all, that is inclusive and welcoming. UNISON winning for our members in SubCos, winning equal pay, winning on LGBT+ rights, winning on disability rights, winning for young workers; UNISON winning for all. In these challenging times, our trade union is a place where we can come together and organise to promote an alternative and inclusive agenda within our workplaces and communities.

Within the Northern Region we have very active Self Organised Groups and through our SOGs liaison group are working together to have SOGs meetings cross branch and service group, overcoming boundaries and silo working. In addition, we are working on identifying key events and campaigns where SOGs will work together and compliment the regional work programme. Despite being the best recruiting region in May we won't rest and will continue to show UNISON to be the union of choice for those within our workplaces.

Linda Hobson, Deputy Regional Convenor

Year of the Young Worker – Creating a legacy for the future

The Northern Young Members group would like to thank colleagues for discussing the importance of Year of the Young Worker and Motion 19 – Creating a Legacy for the Future.

Colleagues will be very conscious of the fact that recruiting young members into UNISON is a task in itself and getting young members active within UNISON is an even tougher challenge. Young Members are UNISON's fastest growing demographic with more and more workers under twenty seven joining a union to protect them from job insecurities and joining the fight against equality.

As 2019 is the Year of the Young Worker - regionally we have organised monthly themes such as community links and voter registration around local elections. Nationally we have worked together to raise the profile of those under 27 within UNISON but it is not an easy task.

We've had an increase in attendees at our monthly meetings, a full delegation for Young Members Weekend and nationally we have many motions put forward to National Conference. We have had many small victories however the battle is not yet won. It has been a fantastic opportunity to have UNISON support Young Members this year however we must recognise that every year that passes another person turns 27 and we must find a successor for their position just as we require a successor for each member who retires. There should be a consistent focus on engaging, recruiting and training young workers because we must invest in the future of UNISON.

Motion 19 called for every Region, Branch and Member to support us in carving out a space for Young Members in UNISON – we are the future AND the now. Thank you for supporting this motion so UNISON can continue to grow and evolve over the coming decades.

Taylor O'Brien
NHS BSA



Cuba@60

Last year our Regional Committee agreed for me to attend the UNISON delegation to Cuba. This was the first national delegation to Cuba in over a decade. The delegation was made up of NEC International Committee members and representatives of six UNISON regions.

This was a particularly interesting time to visit Cuba as 2019 marks the 60th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution which saw the downfall of dictator Fulgencio Batista, who was backed by the US. Under Batista there was widespread inequality, deprivation and racial segregation; with death squads common under mafia rule.

Following the revolution nationalisation and widespread redistribution of land, homes and businesses (previously owned by the US) meant Cuban people and the state could start to decide and define their own fate as a nation.

We visited the capital, Havana and Pinar Del Rio and received a very warm welcome everywhere we visited. As a result of the US blockade and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 (overnight, Cuba lost 70% of its trade due to the collapse of its main trading partner) Cuba went into economic decline. Cuba has turned to tourism as a way of bringing in much needed income. This industry is very much thriving in Cuba. Our guide informed us that under President Obama tourism increased significantly as things were a little more "relaxed", however, since Trump became president things had taken a retrograde step and the impact of the blockades were clearly evident. Cuba is unable to access vital supplies and loans to help build its economy.



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In Pinar Del Rio we visited the local hospital and GP practise. The equipment and buildings may be out dated but health outcomes for Cubans are excellent. The average life expectancy for women is 82 and they have the lowest infant mortality rates in the world. The focus is on prevention and a huge portion of the budget is allocated to public health. This is partly due to the fact they have little access to expensive drugs and high tech equipment. The GP practise we visited saw two women who were sisters living within the community. One, the GP lived upstairs to the clinic with her children and the other, the nurse, lived downstairs with her children. They were absolutely embedded within their communities and knew everyone one of their patients - a few hundred per practise rather than thousands. The whole community helps raise their children supporting single, working women and mothers.



We met with the health union (SNTS) and at that time they were dealing with the withdrawal of 8000 Cuban doctors from Brazil following the election of Jair Bolsonaro as the right wing president of Brazil. Cuba has a proud history of internationalism and we visited the Latin America Medical School (ELAM) which was founded 20 years and has some 29000 graduates from some 83 different countries all funded by Cuba.

Trade union membership is not mandatory in Cuba, however, they have around 98% density. Their subs are 1% of their salary. There's a single collective agreement for ALL health workers - yes, including doctors.

Defining Cuba isn't as easy as saying it's a communist regime. It's so much more than that. It's style of communism, trade unionism and an engaged electorate and mass consultation within communities and workplaces has led to an increase in productivity whilst still investing in public services. This means that education is free for life, as is health and social care are free.

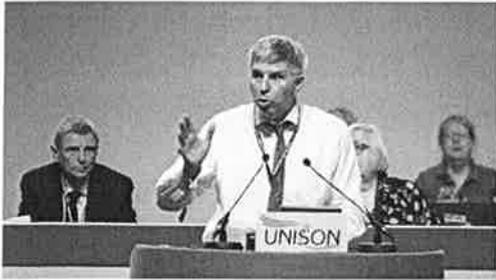
Things are changing in Cuba, the private sector is growing, largely due to the increasing tourist industry. An inequality in wages exists as those employed in tourism are able to attract tips to supplement income meaning they are often better off than those employed as doctors and teachers.

Composite F is excellent and timely and I would ask your branch not just to support the composite but to also look at the actions and see what more you could be doing. Our vet active regional international committee has prioritised our work with Cuba and in this 60th anniversary year of celebration it is also appropriate for us to congratulate the Cuban people and offer solidarity as they defend their right to self determination.

Thank you for the opportunity.

Linda Hobson, Deputy Regional Convenor

Presidential Address



Gordon is a steward from Ayrshire and Arran health branch. He has been a member of the union's

national executive committee since 2009, first occupying a seat representing Scottish members and most recently representing health workers across the UK.

Gordon McKay used the beginning of his speech to refer to that “card vote” moment from last year, showing his great sense of humour and setting his agenda for our conference this year.

He paid tribute to his family for their support through his presidential year. He also recognised the support from UNISON members in branches across all our regions and also his colleagues on the NEC, particularly Lucia McKeever who will be stepping down from the NEC this year.

Gordon should be immensely proud that during his presidential year we have seen UNISON not only recognised as the largest trade union but also a trade union that is very much alive and growing. 15000 new members recruited during our “Growing for Growth” campaign. He mentioned a list of successes of UNISON branches across the regions showing that as well as being the biggest and the best we are winning for our members. Due to the pressure from UNISON we now see that the probation service will be brought back in house, further proof of the failure of the Tories privatisation agenda.

Gordon explained how a visit to Northern Ireland really brought home to him why we must fight against a hard border under a no deal Brexit. Referencing Theresa May's departure from number 10 and a legacy of toxicity. The minister responsible for the Hostile Environment should be shown no remorse. As prime minister she's overseen a zombie parliament massively overshadowed by Brexit. The much promised green paper on social care now some 2 years over due seeing our most vulnerable ignored as evidenced in the Panorama expose, he referred to

“a punitive approach to those in need” as the 5th largest economy in the world now being damned by the UN and the IMF for our approach to poverty. Schools now becoming the 4th emergency service with 9 children in every classroom living below poverty levels and 1.2. million public sector workers still living below real living wage levels. We have also seen the Gender Pay Gap rise under a Tory Government who refuse to deal with the root causes of the issue.

Gordon talked about Boris Johnson being the likely successor to May and his close relationship to President Trump and far right Farage” but gave a very clear warning “hands off our NHS” or you'll face the might of our union.

During his presidential year Gordon has supported mothers and babies in Malawi through this president's charity, building and furnishing a maternity clinic but said it was more solidarity than charity. He spoke of a visit to a local school where the he asked the head teacher what one thing would improve conditions for the school. He was surprised when the response was “a breakfast for every child” and even more surprised to hear it only costs £150 per year to give every child in that school a meal a day for a year. His charity has raised £35000 so far but there's still a way to go. Branches and members can make cheques payable to: UNISON and send them to: Joan Walker, UNISON, 130 Euston Road, London NW1 2AY quoting reference 0090137. Alternatively your branch can make a BACS payment – please contact Joan Walker on j.walker@unison.co.uk for more details.

Finally, Gordon paid respect to his mum who died last year explaining the huge influence she had on shaping his values, values based on equality and fairness, instilling in him the importance of the labour and trade union movement in delivering for our people.

A brilliant opening to conference from our President, a very moving speech full of hope despite the challenges we face. Well done Gordon, have a great conference and keep that card vote bell close



Linda Hobson
Deputy Regional Convenor

Motion 1 – Developing Organising Resources in Branches and Regions

Over the last five years NTW Health Branch have worked with the Region on several projects, with varying degrees of success. We worked with the Region, Northumbria Healthcare and Northumberland Local Government branches to deliver UNISON's first shop front in Ashington. This admittedly has been successful for the Northumberland branches and we are proud to have been part of this partnership working and it has led us on to look closely at what will work for our branch.

- We've had Fighting Fund staff and they've helped us recruit new activists that Regional staff have helped us to develop;
- We've had joint teaching sessions for Apprenticeships and this project goes from strength to strength;
- We are currently working on a project to have a mobile office that will service our many employers across our wide geographical area. We are doing this at a time when North Cumbria members are on the horizon to come into our branch and links there will be important.

Watch out for our mobile office at local events later this year.

Tanya Pretswell, NTW Health

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

Tackling Racism and Challenging Racism

There are two motions on the remaining order of business – 105 Tackling Racism at Work and 20 – Challenging Race Discrimination, Inequality and Unfair treatment of Black Members. These motions highlight the continued need to tackle racism in the workplace.

Since the Brexit vote, racism has increased and this is not because everyone who voted leave is racist but because those who spout the politics of hate have managed to gain further traction in our communities. Blaming the housing crisis, NHS waiting times and lack of jobs on immigrants, when actually as we all know the fault for all these lies with the Tories and their austerity agenda. But they are happy to allow such groups as the EDL, UKIP and football's lads alliance to spread such hate, aided by the right wing media – there is genuine fear felt amongst our black members and their families.

In our Region we have a long standing relationship with Show Racism the Red Card and training has been rolled out across the Region, providing a safe space where reps and activists can have conversations. We have run three Ambassador courses – a twelve week intensive course that equips UNISON reps with information, skills and knowledge to take back to their workplaces.

For UNISON Northern, tackling racism and challenging race discrimination is a core part of our work programme. The Black Members Group has gone from strength to strength and they are an integral part of this organising work.

Nicky Ramanandi, Regional Convenor

SHOW RACISM THE RED CARD

I AM SUPPORTING



FRIDAY 18TH
OCTOBER 2019

#WRD19

International Rally

For me, the Eve of Conference International Rally is one of the highlights of Conference week. It provides the opportunity to meet and hear from trade union comrades from overseas who are engaged in struggles to protect workers' rights in the face of great adversity and to hear from our General Secretary about the range of international solidarity work being carried out by our union.

In his presentation, Dave Prentis referred to UNISON's long history of international solidarity work which has included support for the ANC in the fight against apartheid in South Africa and being the first union to address economic slavery in the global supply chain and to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle against occupation and dispossession. Dave went on to emphasise that "what we do is not just about words, it's about action, through our Development Fund, our support for PSI [Public Services International], our work challenging global tax evasion by multi-nationals and our leadership of the campaign against neo-liberal trade agreements."

We heard presentations from three international guests, the first of which, from Osman Isal from KESK (a Turkish trade union confederation), was via Skype as the Turkish authorities had refused Osman a visa to travel. Osman described the daily attacks on the trade union movement from the authoritarian government of President Erdogan. More than 200,000 public sector workers have lost their jobs under the Erdogan administration and union leaders are subject to routine intimidation including arrest and imprisonment. Osman helped to organise UNISON's recent delegation to Turkey and stressed the value of these solidarity links.

The next speaker, this time in person, was Barbara Gwangwara Tanyanyiwa, who is national secretary of the Women's Advisory Committee of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and president of the Commercial Workers Union of Zimbabwe. Barbara told the rally that since Mugabe was replaced, there has not been any positive change: violations of labour and human rights have worsened with protests against the government's stunted economic policies being met with brutality and many trade unionists have been imprisoned. Barbara went on to say that "workers are living in abject poverty and women are being hardest hit." She emphasised that international solidarity with the Zimbabwe trade unions is vital "We cannot fight alone, they [the government] have guns."

The final speaker was Jucelia Vargas Vieira de Jesus, president of SISERP, the local government workers union of Santa Catarina state in Brazil, an affiliate of Brazil's largest union, the CUT.



Jucelia, who had earlier been a guest speaker at our Local Government Conference, gave an overview of the struggle against the gross inequality and legacy of slavery, which culminated in the leader of the Workers' Party, Lula da Silva, being elected as president in 2003 until 2010. This government, and that of his successor, Dilma Rousseff, brought about a transformation in the lives of Brazilian workers with progressive social and economic programmes. A reaction by wealthy elites, with support from groups in the United States resulted in a coup against President Rousseff and the eventual coming to power of Jair Bolsonaro in January this year. Bolsonaro is a fascist, racist, chauvinistic and homophobic and is seeking to undo all the changes made by the previous

progressive governments. These trade unions are at the forefront of the fightback against Bolsonaro and will need our ongoing support.

Mick Bowman, Northumberland LG

On The Fringe...

Lunchtime: 12.45 pm

2019: UNISON's Year of the Young Worker
Hall 2N

Violence and aggression in the workplace: It's not part of the job
Room 4A

Labour rights under a Labour Government
Hal 1B

Privatisation and in-sourcing - new issues and developments
Hall 2F

Trading away the NHS
Hall 2P

UNISON 2029 Back to the future
#unisonorganising
Hall 1C

Collective bargaining and Trade Union's role in reducing working hours
Room 13

Evening: 5.15 pm

Solidarity with Palestinian workers
Hall 2L

Pay in Police and Justice
Hall 2N

The plus factor
Room 4A

SHOW RACISM THE RED CARD

Challenging Racism in the Workplace
Come along to this afternoon's Fringe Meeting with Show Racism the Red Card where one of the key note speakers is Clare Williams, Regional Secretary

12.45 in Hall 2L

DON'T FORGET TO WEAR YOUR T-SHIRT FOR THE MEETING

SHOW RACISM THE RED CARD
Challenging Racism in the workplace

Speakers Include:



Clare Williams
UNISON - Northern
Regional Secretary



Clark Iwelumo
SRRC Patron & former
Footballer



Roger McKenzie
UNISON - Assistant
General Secretary



Jason Lee
PPA Executive &
former Footballer



Liz Snape
UNISON - Assistant
General Secretary



Elizabeth Cameron
UNISON - NEC Black
member

Wednesday 19th June 2019
12:45 - 13:45

Hall 2L - Lower Level, Liverpool ACC

Sponsored by



STANDING UP FOR YOU



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.

Your Newsheet Needs You!!

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

