

Scotland in UNISON

Scottish council activists' bulletin Use these stories in your branch newsletter or circulate the pdf version to members

Defend the right to strike Public want talks not threats



Davena with Roz Foyer, STUC and Lyn Marie O'Hara, Glasgow

Campaign against "flawed" NCS Bill goes to Parliament

By Stephen Smellie

Chair of Social Work Issues Group & Depute Convener

UNISON Scotland's campaign to get the Scottish Government's National Care Service (NCS) Bill withdrawn, took another step forward when we organised an event in the Scottish Parliament to speak directly to MSPs about our concerns.

Following our evidence to three parliamentary committees before Christmas, the event took place on 11 January and we were joined by COSLA, Social Work Scotland, CIPFA, Solace, Parkinsons UK, Quarriers and CommonWeal. This broad range of organisations share our fundamental concerns about the Bill and a majority support our call that the Bill should be withdrawn or paused to allow for discussions on how the flawed Bill could be rewritten to address the concerns being raised.

The bill has received much criticism, and this was evident in the parliamentary committees who took evidence. Several members of these committees attended the lobby and spoke to UNISON and the other organisations.



Pictured l to r Anas Sarwar, Audrey McCabe and Kate Sharkey, UNISON, Monica Lennon and Daniel Johnson, Labour MSPs

Several MSPs asked for further information and agreed to raise points of concern that we had highlighted. Unfortunately, not all MSPs were able to attend. We are urging branches and members to contact their local MSPs and lobby them to support our call for the Bill to be paused.

Go to the UNISON Scotland website for more information on the NCS Bill including the threat to members' pensions and a link to email MSPs.

UNISON will join other unions across the UK to stand up against the proposed Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill.

The bill is an attack on democracy and must be opposed. It gives huge, unspecified powers to Ministers and would mean that some union members would be required to work during a strike under minimum service agreements.

The fact that the UK government want to legislate for minimum service levels on strike days but refuse to implement minimum safe staffing levels, tells you this has nothing to do with serving the public and everything to do with attacking unions.

The right to strike is protected under international law, for good reason, and UNISON will do everything in its power to stop this legislation going through.

Instead of issuing threats and talking tough the UK government should concentrate efforts on dialogue with unions to solve wage disputes and support ordinary workers

through the cost-of-living crisis. This is what the public are calling for too.

As union activists, we know we already have to jump through multiple hoops before we can take industrial action. The current thresholds for postal ballots are set at levels most politicians could only dream of. We always ensure we provide life and limb cover and losing a day's pay is a very difficult decision, particularly now.

Strikes are always a last resort for UNISON members. UK ministers should stop attacking unions and get round the table and talk.

And here we see why we must defend our right to strike, as part of our tools for collective bargaining.

Strike mandate sees big win at Glasgow

In July 2022, members at Glasgow Caledonian returned a strong vote for industrial action, smashing the threshold,

as part of their campaign for a decent pay rise for all staff. As a result of the solid strike mandate the branch secretary was able to enter into local negotiations to secure meaningful change to terms and conditions for members.

Davena Rankin, Branch Secretary stated that, "After local negotiations, members have gained at least an extra five days annual leave. This means that professional and support staff all now receive 46 days a year bringing us in line with what the academics were always entitled to."

"As well as delivering extra annual leave for staff I am proud that I have also negotiated a re-grading and uplift for our cleaners with the increase in pay backdated to October 2022. The new grade reflects the importance of their role in keeping our campus open and safe. The university also paid a £1,000 non-consolidated lump sum to all staff. While these wins were substantial and had a real impact on my members lives, the fight for a consolidated pay rise for all staff continues".

Tracy Anne – Lothian NHS first woman Employee Director

By Alistair Mack

Lothian Health branch

2022 saw UNISON activist and mental health nurse Tracy Anne Miller elected as NHS Lothian's Employee Director.

Tracy is the first woman to be elected to this post and believes that this role is essentially being a gatekeeper at Board level for all staff governance issues.

Tracy said, "I would like to continue the good work the previous three Employee Directors started. Staff Side organisations need to remain at the heart of decision making within the Board and my ambition is to have a cohesive Joint Staff Side where our broad principles and aims are the same."



Tracy Anne – Lothian NHS first woman Employee Director

Tracy has strong family and trade union roots to bring to this role. Aged only eight or nine at the Edinburgh Miners' Gala day with her father playing the bagpipes in the pit band, she was inspired to become a nurse, when she saw care home residents being looked after by nurses.

Tracy chose to work with the elderly in her training, and her desire to care for elderly people remains steadfast. However, on placement at Rosslynlee Hospital in Midlothian, a mental health hospital she fell in love with mental health nursing.

Tracy said, "Supporting people to live full and contented lives whilst having a mental health diagnosis is very satisfying. A mental health diagnosis should not define the person or limit their goals in life. Every single person with a mental health diagnosis will have a different journey. One size doesn't fit all."

"I was lucky as I was able to work with elderly people who had a mental health condition and therefore fulfilling both of my passions." We wish Tracy Anne all the best in her new role.

Valuing all social work staff

UNISON's Social Work Issues Group has been concerned for some time about the greater responsibilities being placed on our social work members who are 'paraprofessionals'.

These are skilled staff in social work teams who aren't required to have a social work qualification but who are increasingly expected to take on greater responsibilities including holding cases and doing assessments. Needless to say these responsibilities are not matched by pay and we know there are big variations in pay rates between councils and compared with qualified social workers.

To help us tackle this SWIG is launching an online survey of paraprofessional staff. If you work as a social work assistant, family support worker or any other support role in local government social work then please watch out for it coming your way in January.

Together We Rise in Social Care

By Kate Sharkey

Chair of the Social Care Committee

Fair Work in Care – fine sounding words we've all heard from Government and care commissioners for years. Well the time for rhetoric has gone. UNISON demands Fair Work Now!

Our call to you as UNISON members is to bring your power to this battle. Reversing years of exploitation in social care is a mighty challenge but the UNISON campaign says it all – Together We Rise.

Care workers demand decent pay and conditions. Even the employers know this is vital to beat the care crisis. So, this is the year things are going to change – less talk and more action.

UNISON's members in social care are sick and fed up. Sick of saving lives for scant reward. Sick of risking infection and trauma for poverty pay. And sick of the endless

sweet-talk from care bosses who simply don't deliver.

Most care workers don't actually get the Living Wage they're promised under "Fair Work First". And let's be honest, Scotland is kidding itself if we accept the Government line that £10.90 an hour is Fair Pay for frontline care work. We need enforceable rights, and decent levels of pay.

UNISON has new lay leaders in both social care and the wider Community Service Group. We have a mandate to lead change. While we will stay in the dozens of working groups tasked with delivering Fair Work, we've had enough of waiting for shallow words and empty promises. We have our own plan for Fair Work. Our actions will speak louder than the weak words of Government.

Our main aim is to organise care workers for action. Scotland is UNISON's strongest region and we've won well in many sectors. In 2023 we will take that drive and energy to build a powerful voice for workers in social care.



UNISON's legal service is the envy of the union movement. We stopped the UK Government in its tracks on tribunal fees and we've ground the mightiest Scottish employers into submission. In addition to taking organised action by members we will target illegal exploitation in care and take employers and commissioners to task. Care worker rights will be enforced as never before.

In all that, it goes without saying that workers in contracted services will offer undying support to council workers threatened with outsourcing through the National Care Service.

Public sector employment isn't perfect, but it is miles ahead of contracted services in terms of Fair Work. Hawking care services to private bidders is a disaster for Fair Work and a fatal blow to the rights and living standards of all care workers.

Branch thanks air ambulance charity with donation

UNISON Grampian Health branch has donated £1500 to Scotland's Charity Air Ambulance – SCAA to support their work.

Laura McDonald, branch secretary handed over the cheque on behalf of the branch saying: "This will go towards the fantastic service the air ambulance provides, helping those in need across the country."

The branch had a particular reason for supporting this charity, as one of their own members, Marion Singleton, had to be airlifted to safety by the air ambulance in August 2020. She sustained a broken pelvis after a fall at the top of Bennachie, a local hill, and was airlifted to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

Marion described how paramedics and mountain rescue had arrived but quickly saw she would need to be airlifted off the hill.

When the air ambulance go there she had been up Bennachie for a good two hours and had begun to feel cold and shaken. SCAA worked quickly, wrapping and strapping her in, and lifting her into the warm helicopter.

"They had me into ARI within 10 minutes, saving a 50 minute painful and dangerous journey being carried down Bennachie. Their



Laura McDonald and Marion Singleton hand over cheque to SCAA

care was second to none, they were quick, attentive, caring, compassionate, even a bit of humour was given to help me feel more settled," praised Marion.

SCAA makes a difference – a patient's chance of survival and full recovery are

greatly increased if they receive the right medical care within the first hour of injury or illness. The fast response of SCAA and its ability to reach Scotland's most remote and rural areas saves vital minutes when every second really does count.

Lay leadership elections begin

The elections for UNISON's next National Executive Council (NEC) opened on 9 January 2023.

NEC elections are held every two years and are your opportunity to have your say in the lay leadership of our union. Please take part in this process and encourage your members to vote.

The nomination period opened on 9 January and branches will receive letters from hopeful candidates looking for nominations. There are

five seats up for grabs in Scotland. A general seat; (open to both men and women) a male seat; two female seats and a seat reserved for a low paid woman. Candidates must be nominated by at least two branches within Scotland.

Additional to this are seats for Black members, disabled members, young members and service groups and it is likely that there will be Scottish candidates for many of these seats.

The nomination period closes on 13 February

and voting will be held from 17 April until 19 May. The ballot will be postal and will be sent out to all members so please watch out for your ballot paper in the post. And please VOTE and urge your members to do so too.

Successful candidates will take office at the end of National Delegate Conference on Friday 16 June 2023. Their term of office will run until the end of National Delegate Conference on Friday 20 June 2025

SEPA members reject below inflation pay offer

SEPA UNISON branch is planning next steps as UNISON members at the Scottish Environment Protection Agency voted overwhelmingly to reject a final pay offer that would have seen staff faced with yet another pay increase well below the rate of inflation.

Branch co-chair Liz Dundas said: "This offer from SEPA is insulting to staff facing the cost of living crisis. Our members have faced a decade of below inflation pay increases, and 5% does nothing to address what in real terms is yet another pay cut."

"Staff were particularly critical of an offered one-time unconsolidated payment to lower grades that would in effect see their pay reduce again next year."

In a lead-up to the 2022/2023 pay claim, branch held member meetings to consult with members on non-financial benefits they would like to see, but those included were rejected by SEPA.

Liz explained: "Other Non Departmental Public Bodies (covered by UNISON's NDPB service group) have shown creativity and offered

their staff non-financial enhancements such as well-being days, which would not affect the pay offer cost. Our members came up with a range of



suggestions including discounted public travel, a reduced working week trial and additional leave, but SEPA rejected these with no negotiation."

In tandem with the pay campaign, the branch is also campaigning for increased funding for SEPA. This year, the branch submitted a motion

to UNISON's Water, Environment and Transport conference for the first time – 'Properly Fund Our Environment Protection Agencies'.

Branch officer Louise Giblin moved the motion which condemned the ambitious environmental rhetoric used by all governments in the UK as standing in direct opposition to the long-term fall in resources and support for the country's environmental protection agencies which regulate and enforce environmental legislation. It noted that for over a decade, SEPA has been subject to cut or frozen budgets most years. Cuts in resources and staff have seen a continual erosion of the agency's abilities to carry out their core functions and has a telling effect on staff morale.

Liz agreed, and summed up SEPA UNISON's position in a single sentence;

"Our members have made their views clear – enough is enough!"

Acting in solidarity

As well as taking action themselves for better pay, reported widely in SiU over the past few months, UNISON branches and activists have been out showing solidarity with colleagues on strike in other parts of the country and in other unions. Here are just a few examples.

Wilma Brown, Chair of the Health Service Group Exec had a whistle-stop tour of the



Moray UNISON solidarity action

North East Ambulance Branches Picket Lines earlier in January.

Wilma said: "The rain was lashing down, it was icy cold and the wind was howling, but it did nothing to deter our fabulous members standing up for better pay and an end to the crisis around staffing in their service."

UNISON Moray stood shoulder to shoulder with their RMT comrades at Keith Railway Station picket line to show their solidarity and support.

Branch Secretary, Karen Donaldson said: "It quickly turned into conversations around the struggles we all face which have common themes. Different organisations and workplaces, yet the same fights."

NEC members and Scottish UNISON delegates to the TUC, Kate Ramsden, Davena Rankin and Lyn-Marie O'Hara braved the wind and rain to join a Communication Workers Union picket of the main post office in Brighton in support of striking posties.



Solidarity with posties



Wilma joins ambulance members

Strike ready after "extraordinary" year of action

By Danny Phillips

Comms Officer

After a year of action, UNISON Scotland is more strike ready than ever before.

Scottish secretary Tracey Dalling said: "2022 was an extraordinary year for UNISON and for the solidarity of our trade union movement across the UK. A decade of austerity, a pandemic and now a cost-of-living crisis has left public services workers saying enough is enough."

UNISON has run ballots across local government, health, police staff, higher and further education and many other smaller employment groups in the voluntary sector, ALEOs and NDPBs. In some cases it was the first national official postal ballots we have run since the introduction of Trade Union Act.

Tracey added: "We achieved the highest turnouts in living memory. Ran strikes and industrial action. We forced government ministers and the first minister to the table. We secured the biggest pay increases since

devolution – with final deals being significantly higher than the first offer on the table.

"We also secured flat rate pay increases and we should not underestimate how important this is for our lower paid members."

"UNISON membership is on the up. More than 28,000 new members joined us in 2022 as workers saw the true value of trade unions and chose UNISON to represent them collectively during this cost-of-living crisis."



Tracey Dalling

"We are more strike ready than we have ever been. We cleaned our membership data and increased our contact details, which is vitally important as we look forward to our work in 2023. In health, we increased membership email and mobile phone contacts from under 50% to over 80% and it is still rising. We set up industrial action funds and streamlined strike pay processes. More labour intensive than it sounds."

"There's been a huge amount of learning for all of us throughout our industrial action and our strategy for next year is stronger than ever."

"No-one wants to be on strike, we all know this, and we do everything we can to keep public services running. But the fact this action focused year has forced us to do even more to speak to and listen to members concerns makes me even more proud of being in a lay-led union which is even closer to our members."

"Our commitment to fair pay for all and our ability to deliver campaign objectives reinforces our credibility as an industrial union and cemented UNISON as the campaigning union for Scotland."

Launch of Comms Awards 2023

The UNISON Scotland Communications Awards are now open for 2023. They are a great opportunity for sharing the work you do. It's nice to get a bit of recognition but it's even better to inspire and enthuse others with your achievements.

This year sees some changes to the competition categories with Best Online Presence remaining, and the Campaigns category split into Long Running and Short Running Campaigns. We also have the introduction of the aptly named John Stevenson Mischievous and Marvellous Communications Award.

You can download the application form from unison-scotland.org. We look forward to receiving your entries and good luck!

Home carers demand decent pay

South Lanarkshire Home Carers demonstrated outside the Council Headquarters in December, demanding decent pay.



In spite of a very strong case for an increase in grade that included significant changes to the home carer's role, increased responsibility, and their amazing work in the midst of Covid and beyond, the recent job evaluation at South Lanarkshire Council resulted in no change in grade.

Lobbying councillors and the Council Leader, home care members and the branch have built a great deal of support. The job evaluation will now go to an appeal, however, the branch is more than prepared to continue the fight if this fails.



Activist training programme launches

By Audrey Malloy,

Regional Organiser

Scotland Learning and Organising Committee is pleased to launch the 2023 activist training programme. Details can be found at unison-scotland.org/learning

UNISON training is designed to give our activists the skills needed to carry out their roles and to ensure that they can perform them with confidence. All courses are free for you to attend.

UNISON training creates a framework that unites all UNISON activists, providing knowledge and skills for new activists to allow them to become proactive and also re-energising our existing activists.

UNISON education and training is vital to help improve workers' rights and to deliver UNISON campaigns to improve pay and conditions, make workplaces safer and promote equalities.

This year there is a mix of in-person and online events, along with a variety of options for participating in Organising Stewards and Health and Safety courses.

UNISON courses are friendly and informal, and designed on the principle that everybody has equal rights to participate in, benefit from, and contribute to them.

Please contact your branch secretary or education coordinator for information on how to apply for any of the courses.

First Scottish graduates from Organising School

Congratulations to the four Scottish delegates who graduated in November from UNISON's first National Organising School in London.

The hybrid course, delivered across the year, was set up to give lay activists the skills and knowledge of advanced workplace organising methods.



L to R: Lorraine Thomson, Dawn MacDonald, Willie Docherty, Louise Noble.

Louise Noble, UNISON Fife Health Branch said: "We have shared lots of organising strategies and gained an insight into how to further develop our regional organising. The course has been very interesting and enjoyable and was a great opportunity to network with others and build relationships."

Can't wait to see your skills put to practice and shared with your branches.

A better world is possible The Nicaraguan story

UNISON Scotland's International Committee heard from Louise Richards, Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group about the strides made in Nicaragua over the past 16 years.

NSCAG relies almost entirely on trade union funding to carry out our campaigns and solidarity work with Nicaraguan trade unions and is keen to encourage more branches to affiliate to us. Here is why your branch should consider affiliation.

Nicaragua is an example of what can be achieved in a country which puts people above profit. Following 16 years of misery foisted upon the country by a succession of US-backed neoliberal governments, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) under President Daniel Ortega was elected in 2006 and began a series of reforms designed to benefit the poorest and most vulnerable. The privatisations of health and education were immediately reversed and constitutional

rights to free and universal health and education restored.

Since then, the country has made remarkable social progress. Poverty has been halved, maternal mortality has dropped by 70%, infant mortality by 61%, with a 66% reduction in chronic malnutrition in children 6 to 12 years old. With significant government investment in training and local food production programmes, Nicaragua has achieved 90% food sovereignty. Potable water access has risen from 65% to 92%, electricity coverage from 54% to 99% and around 70% of energy comes from renewables.

In gender equality, Nicaragua is 7th in the world, with women in half of all government positions and 164 women only police stations established to tackle incidents of violence



against women. Priority has also been given to low-cost social housing and Nicaragua is a pioneer in defending the rights of its indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples.

The FSLN has retained widespread popular support since 2007, yet successive United States administrations have become increasingly hostile and have continued attempts to oust Nicaragua's democratically elected government through a combination of sanctions and multi-million-dollar financial support for right-wing opposition groups. For over 40 years, the Nicaraguan people have successfully resisted US attempts to destroy the Revolution. The example of Nicaragua, where the wellbeing of its people comes first, is proof that a better world is possible.

Please see www.nscag.org/join-us or email Louise on nscag@nicaraguasc.org.uk for further information.

New committee takes forward vision for Year of Black Workers

Segun Adebayo

Publicity & Campaigns Officer

2023 is the Year of Black Workers and the Scottish Black Members have elected a new committee, which is all set to push forward the equality vision for all Scottish Black members.

For details of committee members see the UNISON Scotland website Equalities section.

The Committee will use the next 12 months to highlight the experiences of Black workers in the UK's workforce and the value they add to both the trade union movement, and also to institutions such as the NHS and other organisations where Black members have been the backbone.

Led by its chair, Raza Sadiq – an accomplished trade union activist and social justice campaigner – the committee will be aiming to enable Black members to achieve their potential, free from prejudice and discrimination.

Raza said: "Year of Black Workers provides an opportunity to acknowledge the contribution



of Black workers and the Scottish Black Members Committee will be calling for better protection of legal rights, equality and social justice for Black workers.



"For the remainder of this year, we want to raise awareness on black workers rights, the need to protect and enforce these rights, explain how equal pay and how the equal pay gap affects black women as well as how these issues that have affected our members can be addressed. We will also be galvanizing members to get involved in their union and become an activist so we can increase the number of Black worker activists within UNISON."

The Year of Black Workers will be launched at the Scottish Council and more details will follow in the days and weeks ahead.

Scottish Parliament applauds UNISON's Year of Disabled Workers

UNISON Scotland's Year of Disabled Workers culminated in a members' debate in the Scottish Parliament in December 2022 sponsored by Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP.

Pam has been a strong supporter since she launched the Scottish campaign at the beginning of 2022. The Scottish Parliament recognised and applauded UNISON's Year of Disabled Workers 2022 campaign.



The debate involved members of all the main political parties. Alison Mitchell, Secretary of the Scottish Disabled Members Committee said that whilst it was great to raise awareness of the challenges that disabled people face, there was no real action plan to tackle the barriers.

"At the crux of the issue is the institutional and cultural discrimination and prejudice which is embedded into our structures and means disabled people face a hostile employment market. The fact that everyone knows it and no one is shocked by it in itself is shameful, but not as shameful as the lack of meaningful action by employers and governments to address it."

As Pam Duncan-Glancy said: "Disabled people and the valuable contribution they make to the workplace has been overlooked for way too long and that must change. If we're truly to reap the benefits of what Scotland's disabled workers have to offer, we need bold action that seeks to close the disability pay and employment gaps, that encourages workplaces to be more inclusive and actions that increase confidence of disabled people to self-define and talk to their employers about their disability and the needs that come along with it."

Alison added that a key aspect of the debate focused on experiences in education that means that disabled young people are less likely to be

in employment, education or training compared to non-disabled. She strongly welcomed the commitment from the Minister to develop a National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy to improve prospects for future generations but said that in general, the new Fair Work Action Plan 2022 barely threw scraps in terms of addressing the disability issues faced by the current workforce. In the absence of this it was difficult to view the commitment to develop a new disability equality strategy to build on A Fairer Scotland For Disabled People as little more than an attempt to kick a problem down the road.

"It was difficult to feel inspired that government plans will deliver the bold action needed to make any meaningful change to the working lives of today's disabled workers, and our members."

Although the Year of Disabled Workers has now ended, the Committee has pledged to continue the campaign and is calling on branches to press employers to sign up to The Disability Employment Charter and the Disability Confident Scheme (or work to achieving 'Level 3' status if already signed up).

We want to hear your news

SiU is your paper, we want to hear your stories

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