

Scotland in UNISON

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

UNISON members will take to streets to demand better



UNISON Scotland members will join tens of thousands of union members on the streets of London on 18th June to protest the soaring costs of food and fuel and to demand a decent income.

Organised by the TUC, the demo will call for a new deal for working people. Under the banner, “We demand better” marchers will demand an above inflation pay rise for every worker and a real living wage for all.

Regional Manager, Simon Macfarlane said: “We are looking

for as many members as possible to join this march and rally. It has never been more important to stand up and be counted.

“With pay rises that are considerably below inflation and the costs of food and fuel rising, more and more of our members and their families are being plunged into poverty.

“All our members are feeling the pinch, but for our lowest paid members, they face an impossible choice between eating and heating their homes.

“Now is the time to stand up and make our voices heard.”

No member should be out of pocket attending this event. The trade union movement in Scotland is looking at putting on transport for members to join the march and rally. Please watch the UNISON Scotland website for further details on how to sign up for that.

You can also approach your branch to ask for travel and accommodation costs to be met.

Lilian Macer, Scottish Convener added: “At a time when the richest are adding to their wealth there is no excuse for making our members pay the price of rising energy and food costs.

“We are still one of the sixth richest countries in the world so spiralling poverty amongst our poorest citizens is a political choice.

“The best way to grow the economy is to put money in the hands of ordinary people. That is both good for them and for our economy because our members spend in local shops and businesses.

“Instead, this government has refused a windfall tax on energy companies making billions and instead has capped pay rises and increased National Insurance contributions.

“Well we say, enough is enough.” Urging UNISON members to join the demonstration, UNISON General Secretary, Christina McAnea warned: “For millions of low-paid workers, the struggle gets worse with every passing month. With prices surging and wages slumping, many households don’t have enough cash to cover the basics.

“Proper pay rises will ease financial hardship, protect essential services and put money back into forgotten local communities.”

John Stevenson – an appreciation

by Kate Ramsden | SiU editor and friend

Most readers will know by now that John Stevenson, who before his retirement edited Scotland in UNISON from its inception 156 issues ago, died on 6th April, less than two weeks after he completed the layout of the last issue.

I knew John for over 40 years as a social worker and a trade union activist. Over the last 20 years we worked closely within the union both on social work issues and communications.

John made a massive contribution to UNISON and the wider labour movement. He was hugely well respected and

almost universally liked across all political allegiances. In part because of his hard work and dedication, his respect for others and his real sense of social justice; and in part because of his sense of humour, his fund of stories and pithy one-liners that would have us convulsed with laughter and that he was only too happy to tell or retell over a pint or two.

Ex-general secretary Dave Prentis, wrote that John represented the very best of our union, and I don’t think many would disagree.

“John was never afraid to speak out on issues that mattered. His sharp incisive intellect, coupled with his wicked

sense of humour always made him the best possible company.”

John took his social work values into his trade union role.

He saw no contradiction. We were there at the start of the social work issues group, which continues to this day. Our first publication was a guide for social work members dealing with asylum seeker children,

“Child’s Welfare Paramount?” which brought that phrase into popular parlance. We were hugely honoured to campaign alongside the Glasgow Girls back then with



some real success.

John was fiercely proud that communications in Scotland was lay led in partnership

with staff, and he modelled this approach from the start. His partnership with the late Chris Bartter was legendary and prolific. He trained up generations of new communications activists and we still use his training to this day.

John was also a wonderful writer and speaker. His passion and compassion shone through in his carefully crafted words,

whether spoken or on the page.

As Danny Phillips, comms officer said: “John was an innovator, he believed unions should use every modern technique to improve the lives of ordinary working people.

He took UNISON into the digital age. UNISON Scotland’s website was John’s baby. He wrote blogs. He pioneered UNISON’s social media.

His work grew and developed giving UNISON Scotland a presence – putting professionally sustained efforts of other unions into the shade.”

John will be hugely missed by all who knew him but there is no doubt that his legacy will live on.

Collective action wins deal to settle equal pay dispute

Glasgow City UNISON members have once again shown the power of collective action after an overwhelming vote for strike action brought the council back to the table in the long running equal pay dispute.

The branch suspended all equal pay strikes after a deal was struck with the council to settle the dispute and end equal pay injustice.

UNISON lawyers will now enter legal discussions over the financial settlement of members' equal pay claims. This will take time which is why action is suspended.

UNISON's Scottish secretary Tracey Dalling said: "This is fantastic news. I want to congratulate every one of the women involved in this struggle to end pay injustice. Particularly UNISON's hard working low paid women who have been resolute to the end.

"It is simply unacceptable that women were forced to take their fight all the way to the brink of strike action. However we now seem to have reached agreement. There is still hard work to do, but this is good news for everyone across Glasgow."

Branch demands action on NHS staffing crisis

UNISON has continued to highlight the impact of staffing pressures in the NHS as the Scottish Borders branch hit the media by writing to all local politicians to highlight "dangerous staffing levels" in local hospitals.

Kayleigh Marie Hughes, branch secretary, has pointed out that the health and care system is under pressure to ensure services are delivered in a safe and timely manner, and the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified existing pressures on staffing and resources in all health and care settings.

"The NHS has been tested to its limits, and so have many of our members. Staff in NHS Borders are reporting serious concerns to their union all underpinned by safe staffing concerns."

Greig Kelbie, UNISON's regional organiser in the Borders, said: "This letter is about the NHS Borders but could be about any other health board in Scotland right now. We are getting regular messages from our members to tell us about the pressure they are under – and that they can't cope. The care system was under pressure before Covid, but the pandemic has exacerbated the situation, particularly at NHS Borders.

"The NHS has been stretched to its limits and it is now at the stage where it is dangerous for patients and staff – we're often told about serious breaches of health and safety, particularly at Borders General Hospital where there are issues with flooring and staff falling.

"We need our politicians to step up and implement change – we want them to make sure the Health and Care Act is brought to the fore and that it protects our members."



By Kate Ramsden

Editor SiU

The 125th STUC Congress, held in Aberdeen in April, was notable this year for our new UNISON delegates and excellent first time speakers.

At the first in-person Congress since 2019, delegates backed UNISON's calls for action on climate change, for fair taxation policies and for a national care service founded on the principles of collective bargaining, workers' voice and local democracy.

Supporting UNISON's emergency motion, moved by Mark Ferguson, Chair of Scottish Local Government, Congress condemned COSLA's derisory pay offer to council staff which does not address the issue of low pay despite over half of council workers earning less than £25k a year and pledged full support for strike action by council workers.

Recognising the widespread human rights abuses and state atrocities in Colombia, delegates also backed UNISON's call for the Scottish Government to suspend the partnership between Police Scotland and the Colombian Government until human rights are guaranteed.

Many of our key activists spoke passionately in the debate, promoting UNISON policies and winning the support of Congress. However this Congress also heard from many new UNISON delegates, and this report focusses on our first time speakers.

The full report of all speakers at STUC Congress can be found on the UNISON Scotland website.

Young people must drive change

UNISON young member and vice-chair of the STUC Youth Committee, Fred Bayer, backed the STUC Youth Conference's call for an education programme, co-produced with young people, to help young workers recognise the power they have as a collective to make changes.

STUC Congress Report

First time UNISON delegates in debate

"Scotland's young people are tile ground for our movement, and for left-wing politics more generally. And yet, most of us don't join a union, and most of us don't even bother to vote in elections," said Fred.

"We, as a movement, have a responsibility to tackle this political apathy head-on, and play our part in bringing young people back into unions, back into politics, back into the debate, because if young people don't drive change, who will?"



Earlier he had supported the call for a campaign for free and safe transport home for all workers finishing work when adequate public transport is not available.

Public sector must lead on energy transformation

First time speaker, Maree Shepherd spoke in a powerful debate on climate change with delegates overwhelmingly backing measures to combat climate change and for climate justice.

Maree slammed the award of 17 ScotWind projects to mainly overseas owned multinational corporations, describing it as "one of the greatest economic failures since devolution."

"Not only have we failed to create jobs in offshore wind and the supply chain, we have lost out on potentially billions of pounds which could have been invested in our public services, and used to achieve a socially just transition to net zero."



Invest in the NHS estate

Another first time speaker, Susan Sim, backed a call for NHS boards to invest in the NHS estate for COVID recovery.



Susan said that problems of inadequate space are widespread across the NHS estate, much of it caused by the poor planning and design of new hospitals.

"To support the NHS to recover from COVID, we need fewer knee jerk decisions and more longer term investment in estates and staffing" urged Susan.

Humanitarian support for Afghan refugees



Zia Hussein, representing Scottish Black members, also a first timer, backed a call on the Scottish and UK governments to open up safe legal routes for Afghani refugees to come to the UK and for more effective resettlement support.

Seconding a UCU motion, Zia warned, "The Tory Nationality and Borders Bill will punish the most desperate Afghan refugees trying to reach the UK and treat them like criminals," adding, "the UK government's latest proposal to process asylum applications in Rwanda is unspeakably offensive."

Congress declares 2022 the Year of Disabled Workers

First time speaker, Jackie Anderson, representing Scottish Disabled Members Committee, spoke in support as Congress followed UNISON's lead and declared 2022 as the Year of Disabled Workers.

Stressing the importance of the social model of disability, she said that for UNISON, the purpose of this year was "to increase our members' confidence to self-define as disabled and to increase the number of disabled trade union activists."



End sexual harassment of women

UNISON's Grace Hepburn made her debut Congress speech, backing action to ensure women are treated with respect and dignity, and calling for a proper enforceable law enabling all employers to be held to account if they fail to act to protect staff from sexual harassment at work.



Grace urged: "We need really strong workplace policies, backed with training for managers, and with the implementation reviewed jointly with the trade union, so that workers can have confidence in it."

Council members on path to strike action

UNISON Scotland's local government leadership are considering their next steps after members indicated their willingness to take some form of industrial action, up to and including strike action, in their dispute with COSLA over pay.

Almost 90% voted that they would be prepared to take industrial action in a consultative

ballot which came after COSLA's only pay offer – below that recommended by the Scottish Public Sector Pay Policy and which did not even bring those on the lowest wages up to £10 per hour. – was rejected outright by all three local government trade unions in March.

Johanna Baxter, UNISON Scotland's head of local government, said: "We simply

cannot go on like this – local government workers deserve better.

"Whilst COSLA and the Scottish Government will blame each other for this paltry pay offer it is our members that suffer – they have already endured a decade of austerity, the stress of working on the frontline of the pandemic and now face a cost of living crisis like no other.

"Low pay is endemic across the sector with over half of local

government workers earning below £25k per year. These results make clear they are no longer prepared to put up with being treated like the poor relations of the public sector."

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RESPECT
REWARD**
Fair Pay Campaign for
Local Government Workers

Members demand dignity in retirement as pensions fight continues

Dundee University UNISON members are continuing their struggle to prevent the University of Dundee plunging them into pension poverty.

This dispute has now lasted over a year. However, members are determined that senior managers within the organisation who earn in excess of 150k per year, and whose pension will not be affected by any proposed change, must reverse their proposal which will plunge hundreds of low paid staff into pension poverty once retired.

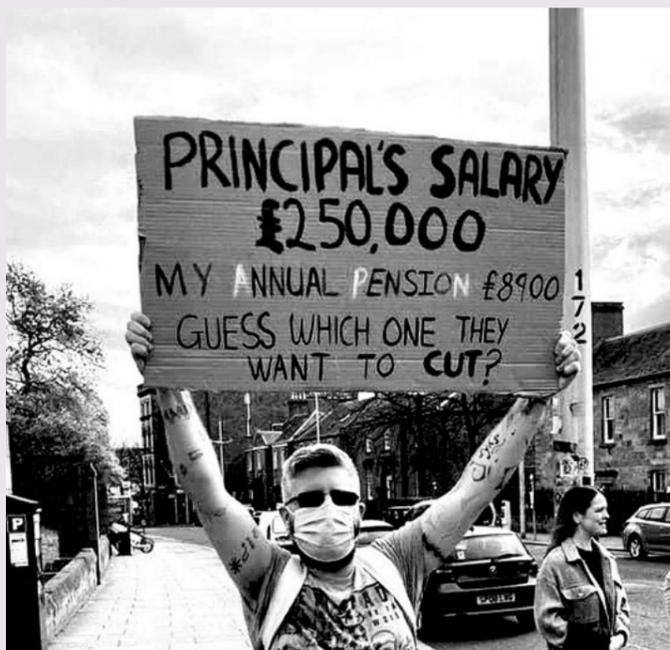
Phil Welsh, Branch Secretary said: "Our members here at the University are the backbone of the organisation.

"Cleaners, admin, security, clerical, library staff and finance assistants. These are the same staff who kept the campus open and safe through two years of COVID hell, and this is how the University rewards them.

"Our members are furious..."

"The latest proposals ask staff to retire later, 68 (which is higher than the state pension age) pay more and get less.

"Our members are furious, and we will continue with our struggle until the University of Dundee does the right thing and offers a pension scheme which allows loyal, hardworking, knowledgeable staff a retirement with some level of dignity."



Napier strikers win £750 payment

Eleven days of strike action by members at Napier University has forced a one off £750 payment to all staff.

Industrial action this spring saw members striking alongside a small number of UNISON HE branches around the UK. This action was taken in response to another imposed pay offer from UK bargaining – 1.5% with some bottom loading, after 0% the previous round.

Lorcan Mullen, Regional Organiser said: "The Napier strikes were solid right to the end, with significant disruption to campus services and very well attended, spirited pickets throughout.

"While there has been no breakthrough in national negotiations from UNISON or (much more extensive) UCU strike action, the Napier campaign resulted in a £750 one-off payment, which is considerably more in cash terms than the imposed national offer."

Lorcan added: "With the strength and confidence gained from taking impactful strike action, Napier is (at the time of writing) leading the UK in turnout figures in our consultation on the employers' below-inflation final offer for 22/23.

"The branch is also moving towards local disputes on the 35 hour working week and annual leave parity, long issues of controversy at Napier and the subject of much discussion on picket lines.

"While action in this round is over, late donations to the branch's strike fund are welcome, with the very strong chance of further action and campaigning in HE this autumn."

Time to put NHS pay right

UNISON Scotland's health committee, along with other trade unions, are seeking urgent talks with the Scottish Government on pay and conditions for NHS workers.

The unions have submitted a joint pay claim on behalf of all staff covered by the Agenda for Change (AFC) pay arrangements within NHS Scotland.

Head of Health, Matt McLaughlin said: "NHS staff are

facing the largest cost of living crisis for a generation. Experts predict that overall costs to households will go up by at least £1,200 in 2022. We think a pay rise is only a real rise if it goes up by more than living costs – a pay rise below inflation is a pay cut.

"We have also seen mounting evidence of a healthcare workforce crisis which, without urgent intervention, will have a significant impact on NHS Scotland both in the short and long term.

**PUT
NHS
PAY
RIGHT**

UNISON
the public service union

"Headline pay awards are important but other issues matter too. Over the last months we have heard from lots of members telling us that a range of other earnings issues are affecting them – and their income – just as much," added Matt, calling for banding outcomes that reflect the job, fair reward for additional hours, a limit to excess hours to prevent burnout, support for career development and measures to promote recruitment and retention.

UNISON welcomes mileage rates increase for NHS staff but demands same for low paid care workers

As fuel prices in Scotland reach record highs, UNISON has welcomed the agreement between NHS Employers and Scottish Government to increase mileage rates for NHS staff using their own car for work.

At the same time, however, UNISON's calls for Humza Yousaf, Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, to increase mileage allowances for social care workers in the third and private sector have so far fallen on deaf ears.

The increase of 5p per mile for NHS staff is a temporary measure and came after it was felt that discussions at a UK level were unlikely to conclude fast enough to ensure that UNISON members were not out of pocket on fuel costs. It is to be reviewed every four months.

UNISON Head of Health, Matt McLaughlin said: "In March fuel costs went through the roof and UNISON members rightly raised concerns that it was costing them money to use their car to do their job.

"I am pleased that the

employers and Scottish Government moved quickly to respond to those concerns, however let's not pretend that this temporary measure is a long term solution. The NHS travel scheme is out of date and needs to be reviewed to reflect modern work practices and the critical environmental agenda.

"It is simply not sustainable for staff to use their own car to deliver NHS services in the longer term unless they are fully compensated and supported in their work. Needless to say, if fuel prices continue to increase, UNISON Scotland will be looking for this allowance to be increased and extended."

Lowest paid must not shoulder burden

UNISON is also calling for social care workers, who often drive from client to client using their own cars, to get an uplift in mileage.

John Mooney, UNISON Scotland head of social care said: "It's inconceivable that the lowest paid workers are expected to shoulder the burden



of increased fuel costs without assistance. Once again social care workers in the third and private sector are being treated as the poor relations in Scottish public services.

"UNISON is urging Humza Yousaf and Kevin Stewart, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, to sit down with us to discuss how we can support these low paid essential workers.

"There are more than 1,200 social care employers in Scotland. The Scottish Government must put mechanisms in place to ensure that challenges faced by social care staff are adequately addressed to allow the continued delivery of essential services to the most vulnerable in society."

UNISON condemns killing of Shireen Abu Akleh

UNISON has joined the trade union movement around the world in condemning the killing of the respected journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, killed by the Israeli military whilst reporting on a raid in Jenin, in the occupied West Bank.

We have sent our solidarity and deepest condolences to her family, friends, colleagues and all those who mourn her tragic loss.

We have also expressed our shock and outrage at the appalling scenes at Saint Joseph Hospital, when security forces beat the pallbearers who carried her coffin and ripped the Palestinian flag from the hearse, denying Shireen the dignity and respect she deserved as her body was laid to rest.

The tragic circumstances of Shireen Abu Akleh's death and her funeral have shone a light on the brutality of the occupation she reported on for the last 25 years.

As the people of Palestine mourn and commemorate the 74th anniversary of the Nakba and 55 years of occupation, UNISON has pledged to continue campaigning in the hope that their demands for freedom, justice and peace are realised.

Lifting the lid on invisible disabilities

During the Year of Disabled Workers, Scotland in UNISON is looking at a range of issues that affect our members. Here, Jackie Anderson of the Scottish Disabled Members Committee looks at invisible disabilities, the employer's duties and the supports available through reasonable adjustments.

Invisible disabilities is an umbrella term that captures a spectrum of health conditions that show no physical signs.

In work, around 70% of disabled people have an invisible disability yet perceptions of disability remain firmly fixated on people using physical aids.

Many people acquire a health problem or disability in later life. By then they've been exposed to a lifetime of myths and perceptions around disability to a point they don't want to be categorised as disabled and don't want to disclose they're disabled. Yet playing down your own health condition to prevent 'rocking the boat' or because you don't identify as 'disabled' can have serious health consequences and could lead to you losing your job because you don't have the supports that you do need.

A survey by the Welsh TUC noted that 67% of people felt there was more stigma associated with disabilities that other people can't see. The fact that your disability can't be seen often leads to a lack of belief by others or challenge, followed by a lack of willingness to support reasonable adjustments. Working in that type of environment is extremely stressful.

UNISON's own Reasonable Adjustments bargaining guide, model policy and accessibility passport can help your branch negotiate a reasonable adjustment policy and provides templates of a model disability policy and accessibility passport. The passport is essentially a contract detailing what adjustments the employer will provide the person so they can do their job. It passes with them as they change manager or job role so that they don't have to keep repeating their 'story', ask for, or justify what they need and why.

The DWP provides a range of disability services, benefits and grants including Access to Work, which is a discretionary grant for workers who have a disability or health condition, that makes it a struggle for them at work or travel to work. It supports a key UK government pledge to get a million more disabled people into the workplace by 2027.

The grant doesn't replace your employer's responsibility to provide reasonable adjustments, but can assist meet the cost. There's also a Mental Health Support Service, where workers can self-refer directly to the providers (Remploy or Able Futures), so you don't even have to tell your employer you're applying for that support.

Scottish Council recognises top comms work

By Jane Aitchison

Comms & Campaigns Committee

The return of the Scottish Communications Awards at the April Scottish Council of branches recognised the work activists have done against the backdrop of the pandemic.

The arguments for properly funded, properly staffed public services with decent pay and conditions for workers have never gone away and we have continued to push forward our national and local campaigns, fighting for jobs, pay, conditions, safety and equality.

table over the 2019 equal pay agreement. The branch involved members with phone banking, video and demonstrations.

Forth Valley Health took the TC Branding third prize, fighting for their members to get their legally-entitled, essential breaks for their own and their patients' safety and wellbeing.

Edinburgh also took first prize in the UIA Best Online Presence category for a full complement of online provision, with a very well-designed website at its core linking into social media, furthering



Louise Noble picks up the LV= special recruitment award on behalf of Fife Health



Kate Ramsden and Stephen Smellie receive the Chris Bartter Award on behalf of SWIG

City of Edinburgh scooped the Best Campaigns top prize for their excellent work saving four care homes, engaging the workers, the politicians and the public. They didn't stop there and looked for prospective councillors in the recent council elections to pledge support for health and social care services.

A close second was Glasgow City delivering a vote for strike action in their equal pay dispute, forcing the Council back to the

local campaigning and promoting Scottish and National issues.

Second prize went to the Fife Health Branch for well-rounded online provision with great use of graphics and videos.

Inverclyde Branch took third prize for right up-to-date online provision. Both had cleanly designed websites, effectively linking into Facebook and Twitter.

Inverclyde topped the Best Printed Publication category with their ten times a year, nicely

designed and nicely named magazine – Bread and Roses.

Second prize went to the NHS Glasgow and CVS branch for a well-designed magazine full of local, Scottish and national information, with some hard-hitting photography. Scottish LGBT+ won the Lighthouse Financial third prize for a colourful magazine, jam packed



Tom Muir, City of Edinburgh collects award from UIA's Sara McLelland for best online presence

full of photos and showing, in action, their organising agenda.

The LV= Special Recruitment prize went to Fife Health for an ongoing recruitment campaign with high profile sponsorship of an ice hockey team, the Fife

Flyers, and a novel use of QR recruitment codes to encourage traffic to the website.

UNISON Scotland's Social Work Issues Group won the Chris Bartter Prize for Creativity in Communications for their series of online seminars, that recruited more members and social work activists. Moreover they engaged with social work leaders, Ministers and COSLA on common challenges facing social social work across Scotland.

Well done to everyone for all their fantastic communications work and thanks again to our sponsors – UIA, LV=, Lighthouse Financial and TC Branding.



Gary McMenemie accepts the award for best printed publication on behalf of Inverclyde branch

Phil delivers aid to Ukraine

Dumfries and Galloway branch chair, Phil McGroggan has joined the growing list of UNISON activists providing practical support to the people of Ukraine.

He has recently returned from Ukraine after delivering aid for two weeks. Although he had never driven a truck before, Phil responded to a call from his church, and made the 1500 mile journey to Hungary on the

Ukrainian border where he picked up supplies to take into Ukraine.

Phil said: "It's a four and a half hour trip from the Ukraine border to our destination where we had to leave the provisions and all along that journey, every little village that we drove through was so beautiful and so scenic.

"We just saw people going about and trying to have a normal life.

"And we wondered what was going on in their minds under



the weight of oppression that they're coming under. They must wonder if they will be the next village that gets targeted."

Now safely back home in Dumfries, Phil is urging others to make the same journey he did to help those in Ukraine.

We want to hear your news

SIU is your paper, we want to hear your stories

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