

MANCUNION

THE UNISON NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2013



20 YEARS OF UNISON - 65 YEARS OF THE NHS

In this month's issue...

Very much a birthday theme this issue, as we celebrate 20 years of UNISON. 2013 also marks 65 years of the NHS. Here we discuss the current threats to the NHS and how you can help by joining the Save Our NHS Rally in September.

We report back on this year's UNISON National Conferences and this year's Branch AGM with our fantastic guest speaker Owen Jones.

We have the latest update on the Future Directions dispute in Rochdale. Plus Galleries Steward Jane Wilcox talks Anish Kapoor, Middlesbrough FC and why she doesn't want to be Prime Minister.

Personally we think she'd be great...

Hope you enjoy it.

James Crowley and Patrick Taylor

Guest Editors

In my view...



Our members, families and communities continue to endure a wave of attacks by the ConDem government on their living standards, their public services and their individual rights.

Recent assaults include the introduction of the bedroom tax, cuts to benefits and the introduction of fees for workers to lodge Employment Tribunals.

UNISON will ensure no member with reasonable grounds to take a claim will be stopped from doing so by fees that are in excess of £1,000. We will ensure no one is denied justice for the sake of these unjust charges.

But the attacks continue and will escalate in the death throes of this Government who are determined to do as much damage in the time remaining before people have the chance to boot them out.

Already on the horizon are the plans to further privatise the NHS and the post service.

On a scale Thatcher never dreamed of.

But we, our families and friends and our communities have an opportunity to voice our public opposition to this Governments destructive policies.

There will be a National TUC Demonstration here in Manchester on Sunday 29th September (the first day of the Tory Conference in Manchester).

Make a note of the day and bring along as many people as possible to publicly show that the Tories and their policies of social vandalism are not welcome.

Let's show the country our opposition and help resist the scale of this Governments attacks on our society.

Pat McDonagh - Branch Secretary

Your UNISON Branch

UNISON Manchester is organised by the Branch Executive Committee and is supported by skilled staff - locally, regionally and nationally.

The UNISON Manchester Branch Officers are listed below.

Branch Chair: Sonia Stewart

Vice Chair: Steve Lynch

President: Mo Baines

Vice Presidents: Ruth Carr & Nixon Tod

Branch Secretary: Pat McDonagh

Assistant Branch Secretaries: Evelyn Doyle, Eddy Redmond, Jane Slater, Patrick Taylor, Julie Connolly, Cathryn Baggaley, Vimal Gadher & Rena Wood.

Joint TU Nominee to m people: Pete Banks

Equality Officer: Sonia Stewart

Branch Treasurer: Julie Connolly

Communications Officer: Rod Fawcett

Mancunion Editor: Noel Bayley

Education Officer: Steve Lynch

Health & Safety Officer: Geoff Archibald

International Officer: Isobel McVicar

Welfare Officer: Helen Clarke

Labour Link Officer: Julie Connolly

The Branch Executive Committee, the Branch's decision-making body, comprises of stewards from across all the workplaces represented by the Branch plus elected Officers. All members of UNISON Manchester are encouraged to attend meetings, vote in Branch elections and get involved in our campaigns and activities.

We are always looking for people who feel they can contribute to the work of the Branch and help other members. This could be a regular commitment or you could be a 'mailbox' contact and help pass on UNISON information to members in your workplace. The Branch provides training courses, advice and support for all our stewards and officers.

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Tel: 0161 254 7500

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Email: unison@manchester.gov.uk

Web: www.unisonmanchester.org

Twitter: @UnisonMcr

If you have a membership query, please contact the Branch via one of the contact methods listed above.

Save Our NHS

Tell the pubs to stock up on champagne and caviar. Tell the restaurants to take out insurance against Bullingdon Club activities. Tell Byron Burger to take on extra staff.

That's right. The Tories are coming to town.

In September, the Conservative Party Conference will be held here in Manchester. Choosing Manchester as the venue shows the traditional Tory arrogance. They are coming to spend a week making self aggrandising speeches in a city where they have cut public services to the bone and reduced the income of hard working families.

Make no mistake, they are not welcome.

However, they are not the only people coming to Manchester.

On Sunday 29 September, we will be welcoming thousands upon thousands of UNISON members from across the country who will be joining us in a mass demonstration in defence of our NHS.

At our National Delegate Conference this year, UNISON called for a national demonstration here in Manchester.

Other Trade Unions have responded and the TUC are in full support to create a mass protest involving all trade unions, their members, family and friends.

And why? Because The NHS needs defending like never before.

As our National Health Service is celebrating its 65th birthday, the Tories clearly see 65 as retirement age for public services. The services that they can't shut down are proposed to be sold off to the highest bidders.

In 2005, the current Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt was a co-signatory to a book called 'Direct Democracy: An Agenda for a New Model Party' by Douglas Carswell. It contained the following quote:

"Our ambition should be to break down the barriers between private and public provision, in effect denationalising the provision of health care in Britain."

Which is why most people believe he is a complete and utter Hunt.

The health reforms introduced by this Government have already opened the door to private companies under the cloak of "patient choice" or "better services". But no matter

what they call it, we know what the real agenda is: privatisation and part of the ongoing Tory agenda to dismantle the welfare state and take this country back to a pre-war state.

Despite the promises on Cameron's air brushed posters, we have seen swingeing cuts to NHS services. Symbolically this month has seen the announcement of the closure of the A & E department at Trafford General, where the NHS was founded.

You can't trust a Tory with the NHS. As Nye Bevan the founder of the NHS said:

"No amount of cajolery, and no attempts at ethical or social seduction, can eradicate from my heart a deep burning hatred for the Tory Party. So far as I am concerned they are lower than vermin".

So make sure you are there on the 29th to show that the NHS is not for sale.

Check the Branch website for further announcements as they are available.

See you there!



**I'm coming to Manchester.
I wonder if everyone will be
pleased to see me?**

**Save
Our
NHS**

TUC Save Our NHS Rally. Sunday 29th September

20 Years Of UNISON Manchester

How The Branch Was Formed

Happy Birthday everybody! 2013 marks twenty years since the formation of UNISON from our parent unions The National Union of Public Employees (NUPE), The National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO) and The Confederation Of Health Service Employees (COHSE).



Murmurings of a merger in the late 80's soon became full blown discussions. The 1992 Conferences of each of the unions represented a turning point. All three conferences voted for the merger. This was followed by a ballot of all members, with a resounding yes vote for UNISON. The new union was established on 1st July 1993.

The ballot would only establish the union formally though. Here

in Manchester it meant bringing together eight different branches, The Manchester Municipal Officers Guild from NALGO and seven NUPE branches: Manchester and Wythenshawe School Meals, Manchester Caretakers (Housing), Manchester Education, Manchester Nursery Nurses, Manchester Officers, Manchester Parks (General) and Manchester Social Services.

By no means an easy task! The first step was to establish a Joint Branch committee with Pat McDonagh from NALGO and Steve Lynch from NUPE as Joint Secretaries. The first meeting of the UNISON Interim Branch Executive Committee, made up of activists from all eight branches, was on the 12th August 1993 in the council chamber.



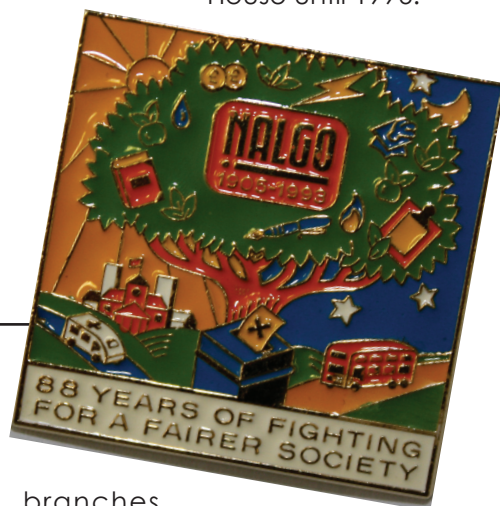
Pat has proved to be something of a historian, providing large amounts of documents from the merger to contribute to this article. Through them we can see the evolution of the branch rules, from the old

municipal officer's rules edited in biro through to the finished article.

The documents also reveal the occasional hiccup in setting up the branch. Today we are pleased to have the UNISON members at the Royal Northern College of Music within the Branch, but in 1996 letters show that the members' first instinct was to set up an independent branch.

But even the earliest documents set out the principles that the branch carries on today. That we be representative, accessible and member led.

It would take three years (and a lot of hard work) to get from a joint trade union committee all the way through to formally becoming a single branch. The letter confirming us as Branch 6465 "The Manchester Branch" wouldn't drop on the mat at the old offices at Cumberland House until 1996.



What's In A Name?

The formation of the branch meant a great deal of talk about what it should be called. Some documents from the time of merger see us referred to as Manchester Local Government Branch, Others say UNISON Manchester (Local Government) (Officers). There was even talk of the

controversial Manchester City Branch.

With other Branches being formed in the city, us being called simply The Manchester Branch might have been unpopular with some. Julie Connolly the former NUPE Housing Branch Secretary recalls how Pat McDonagh settled the issue.



"Pat spoke at the meeting and said 'we're one of the biggest

branches in the country. We can call it whatever we bloody well like. We'll be the Manchester Branch".

It proved to be a good decision. Not tying the Branch name to a particular employer has worked well with our aims to give the same level of service and representation to all of our members, no matter where they work.

20 Years Of UNISON Manchester

What Did The Manchester Branch Ever Do For Us?

The advantages of a larger single branch have been clear. In Manchester City Council all of us working together were able to retain, or improve on all the NJC "Green Book" arrangements.

We won a 35-hour week, two hours less than the national agreement. Our members get 30 days leave after 5 years, far earlier than many councils. When Single Status and job evaluation came we were able to secure three years pay protection, now one of the highest in the country. We also introduced the Manchester Minimum Wage well before national developments.

For the entire 20 years of UNISON we have prevented there being any compulsory redundancies. This included negotiating a whole new process for the redeployment of staff in the form of m people, which was voted in by a full ballot of members.

Though making bids for funding though the TUC we have been able to have a full time officer working on Union Learning, establish a network of Union Learning Reps and help our members to access new learning opportunities.

We have worked with the City council in establishing the new apprenticeship scheme, providing new opportunities for hundreds of

young people in our city.

Outside the council there have been victories too. We have secured the Living Wage at The Manchester College. By having the resources and support that a larger branch provides we have secured recognition agreements at numerous employers including the Museum of Science and Industry, INTO Manchester and more recently at The National Autistic Society.

This of course comes on top of the thousands upon thousands of grievances, disciplinary hearings and workplace issues that the branch has represented its members on down the years.

As one of the largest branches in the country we are also able to influence UNISON policy, both Regionally and Nationally. It is our branch that has, driven forward the campaign for industrial action on pay.

We have engaged in projects in the wider community, working in partnership with Hope Not Hate to campaign against the BNP. Recently we have been a driving force behind Go On Manchester, helping people in Manchester to learn new IT skills.

Through Labour Link we have campaigned hard to remove Liberal Democrat Councillors from

Manchester. We are pleased to say that since 2011 every Con-Lib Dem who has stood for election has lost.

We were successful in our campaign against Manchester having a Boris Johnson style elected Mayor.

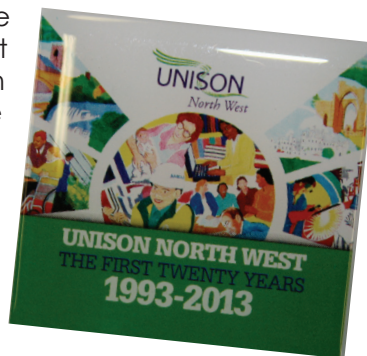
We have also been able to use our collective strength to help others through our international work. Since 1995 we have been privileged to work alongside Denis Goldberg and Isobel McVicar, supporting their work in Community H.E.A.R.T., which

supports the people of South Africa, in their struggle to overcome the awful legacy of apartheid. Supporting self-help projects based on the hopes, aspirations and initiatives of local people and communities.

The Branch also has strong links to Cuba through our work with the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. In 2004 Branch Officers Bob Oram and Pete "Pedro" Banks accompanied sixteen young people involved in the Youth Inclusion Project on a visit to Cuba. These young people had been involved in a project repairing out of use ambulances, which were then shipped to Cuba for use by their health service.

But as we take time out to celebrate the past, the most important thing for UNISON Manchester will always be the future. Every member working together to get the best possible results for all. As our banners and leaflets always say:

"UNITY IS STRENGTH"



Owen Jones Addresses The Ann

It was a packed meeting room that welcomed the guest speaker, Owen Jones, for the Branch's Annual General Meeting in February. Well over 200 members were treated to a fine, rousing speech, from a (nearly) local lad (brought up in Stockport) whose trade union steward dad taught him the art of public speaking with a LOUD voice. No microphone required.

He began by pointing out that this incompetent government has delivered austerity, piled on more debt and has encouraged a more prolonged recession than the depression of the 1930s. Even in its own terms, this is a catastrophic failure. Noting how Government, with a right wing media onside, has transformed the banking and finance crisis into a crisis of public services, Owen highlighted the two aims of the Coalition. Firstly, to make working people pay for a crisis they did not cause, and secondly to use austerity as a cover to introduce policies even Mrs Thatcher would have hesitated at, such as privatising the NHS.

He pointed out that Government had made this April truly the cruellest month, by further attacking welfare and benefits and playing the age-old game of divide and rule, pitting pensioners against job seekers and those in need of benefits. Exaggerating the extent of benefit fraud but simply ignoring the colossal amount of tax avoidance that robs the Treasury and public services of money, Government continues to allow high profile companies to escape from paying their fair share.

Owen reminded us however that this Government is weak, partly as a result of sheer incompetence but also because their vision of the future is so unconvincing and, let's face it, gloomy. More of the same of high unemployment, no industrial policy, rip-off housing market, shrivelled local government services and zero-hour contracts for workers is not exactly an appealing prospect. He argued that trade unions need to continue their campaigns, on pay, on pensions, on defending the NHS, and finished by reiterating

that there are alternatives to austerity Britain, that are practical, fair and popular.

There was time for some questions from members, before he received a hearty and well deserved round of applause, and a gift from the Branch to accompany him on his way home.

Then it was onto the business of the AGM. The Branch Secretary ballot result was announced (Pat McDonagh being elected), Evelyn Doyle gave an update on the Branch Development Plan and the AGM turned to discuss the motions which had been circulated to all members, including: Public Sector Pay - Hard Facts, Hard Times; Council Budget Cuts; Defend the NHS; and English Defence League.

Before you knew it, time was up for a really productive and galvanising meeting. Roll on next year, and if you've any suggestions for a speaker that can match Owen's brains and passion, let us know.



Manchester Branch members in attendance at our AGM



Owen Jones is also the author of **"Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class"**, one of the NY Times Top Ten Non-Fiction books for 2011.

For more writing from Owen you can visit his website at owenjones.org

Annual General Meeting



Imogen Thomas from **Thompsons Solicitors** and Marj Hardy from **Manchester Credit Union** attended to provide information on legal and financial services for members.

Mark Nelson and Martin Edgerton from **Britannia** and **LV= Frizzell** staffed their stall to talk about exclusive mortgage deals and insurance offers for UNISON members.



Branch Website Update

The results of our Branch website survey are now in and we want to thank each and every one of you that took the time to complete it.

We rely on the valuable feedback from our members to ensure that we communicate effectively and our website is one of the key tools we use to spread our message,

campaign on local issues and much more.

It is going to take us a little time to go through all the suggestions and although we can't promise to incorporate every requested feature, we will certainly do our best to bring the website look and feel up-to-date, whilst continuing to provide the latest news and

updates that you have come to expect.



This Year at Conference

June saw Branch Delegates attending the UNISON Local Government and National Delegate Conferences. These conferences set the rules, policy and agenda for the future and our delegates are there to make your views heard. How we vote on the motions is decided by the Branch Executive Committee, made up of stewards and activists from across the branch. Members were able to see how we voted in real time via Twitter this year and read daily updates on the branch website.

Here we highlight what some of the delegates said on your behalf.

Your Branch Secretary **Pat McDonagh** opened up the National Delegate Conference speaking on Employment and Trade Union Rights.

Pat was emphatic in his assessment of the situation, reminding conference that "the Coalition Government is attacking the historic achievements of the Labour Movement."

Pat talked through the changes to employment tribunals. Not only do employees now have to have been employed for two years before they can lodge an unfair dismissal claim, but also from 29th July workers will have to pay tribunal fees of £1200.

Pat made the Manchester Branch view clear. "Where lodging an employment tribunal has previously been about a worker exerting a citizenship right to have an external opinion on an employer decision, the introduction of fees turns filling in an ET1 form into something closer to filling in a betting slip".

"It should not be necessary to speculate in order to accumulate when it comes to a matter of justice."

Rena Wood spoke at Local Government Conference on Motion 22 – Campaigning for Part-

Time Workers Rights.

This is an ongoing issue for our union. 55% of Local Government workers are part time staff, of whom over 90% are women. Rena reminded Conference of the working reality that many such members can be quite isolated from the wider union, finishing their day when everyone else is starting, or simply unable to engage in the union because of the nature of their hours.

Part-time workers are too often forgotten or marginalized by employers. As Rena said, "when our part-time members make mistakes they get disciplinarys; when the Chief Executive of Thames Water makes mistakes, he gets mentioned in the Queen's birthday honours".

Eddy Redmond was one of the last speakers of the Local Government Conference.

Always a rousing speaker, Eddy gave a very personal speech relating his early work in Local Government setting up youth services. He spoke about the numerous projects that ran seven days a week right across the city. Services that were vital for so many young people.

He then told us the harsh truth about the effect of Government cuts in Manchester, that the cuts had "decimated the youth service."

"There's nothing left. That's what you call a cut, comrades!"

The best of the guests...

Guest speakers are often a highlight at conference.

Sometimes they highlight particular campaigns, sometimes they provide a valuable look at ways in which our union may be able to work and benefit. Here are our favourites from each conference.



Jane Carter

Our international speaker at Local Government Conference was Jane Carter, from The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

Jane's work involves her dealing with the "American Way", outsourcing public services in corporate America. Such as in Chicago, where parking services and traffic wardens were outsourced on a contract which will not end until 2084. The company in question will be making pure profit for around 70 years, and there will be very little that any future local authority can do about it.

She also told Conference about the scandal of Corrections Corporation of America who offered to run prisons for numerous US cities. Provided the city would guarantee that they would keep them at least 90% full. This would be funny, except it is absolutely true.

This has meant new challenges for AFSCME. Some of the strategies they have employed include training activists to analyse legal documents to be able to find flaws and illegalities in bids for contracts and challenge them. They also use the lobbying pressure they have through the votes they have in their pension scheme. Both are tactics UNISON could do well to employ as we campaign to have voting rights on the boards of the Local Government Pension Schemes.

If these extremes of privatisation are still to come in Britain there is much we can learn from AFSCME.



Ricky Tomlinson

At National Delegate Conference, the first item on the agenda was simply listed as "Welcome to Liverpool." It proved to be a rousing welcome from guest speaker, Ricky Tomlinson.

Ricky gave an impassioned speech on the Shrewsbury 24 Campaign and his desire to overturn the miscarriage of justice that he and other pickets endured as a part of the 1972 National Building Workers Strike. In the 1970s, building workers faced the worst health and safety conditions in British industry, hostile and powerful employers, and received very low pay. Ricky was one of the 'Shrewsbury 24' and went to prison for 16 months for his involvement in the dispute.

The campaign has been fraught with issues, most notably this Government's unwillingness for documents relating to the case to be released. Ricky was clear that the campaign is still 'fighting for full disclosure'. Some of the documents still remain embargoed for decades, apparently in the interest of 'national security'. The much more likely truth is that disclosure will embarrass senior Tories, as it would show how a previous Conservative government, together with its friends running the construction industry, directly intervened in a legitimate trade dispute.

Plots and dark dealings continue, as the e-petition for a parliamentary debate has seen thousands of votes registered, then deleted, to the point where a paper petition is now being used.

Industrial Action in Rochdale



Over 100 UNISON members employed by Future Directions in Rochdale have been taking strike action against changes in terms and conditions,

Future Directions is a Community Interest company established in July 2012 by Calderstones NHS, delivering social care services in the area. Future Directions took on the contract from Rochdale Council in October 2012, in full knowledge that to make the contract viable they would need to save money. UNISON says it is wrong to make the savings by drastically slashing member's pay, in some cases by as much as £10,000 a year.

Future Directions have tried to attack staff defending their rights by using anti-union laws, and initially strike action was blocked by an injunction taken by the employer.

Rochdale Branch Secretary Helen Harrison said, "Our members provide a vital service to vulnerable adults living in Rochdale. They do a tough job, and now they are being asked to do it for even less money, on worse terms and conditions.

Some of our members may lose their homes because of these drastic cuts. They care deeply about the services they provide, but have no choice but to take this strike action".

In addition to strike action UNISON is lodging nearly 100 tribunal claims on behalf of members.

The Manchester Branch, amongst many others in the trade union movement, will continue to support our colleagues in Rochdale in all demonstrations and industrial action. To help in allowing them to maintain the strike the Manchester Branch has donated £5000 to the Rochdale Branch hardship fund.

We cannot allow a situation in which a company bids for a contract at a price where they know in advance that they will not honour TUPE arrangements and cut terms and conditions to make a profit. The Rochdale Community and Voluntary Sector Rep John Morrisson said, "A win in Rochdale is a win for the country and UNISON can use that victory forever and a day."

If you want to help, then get in touch and get active!

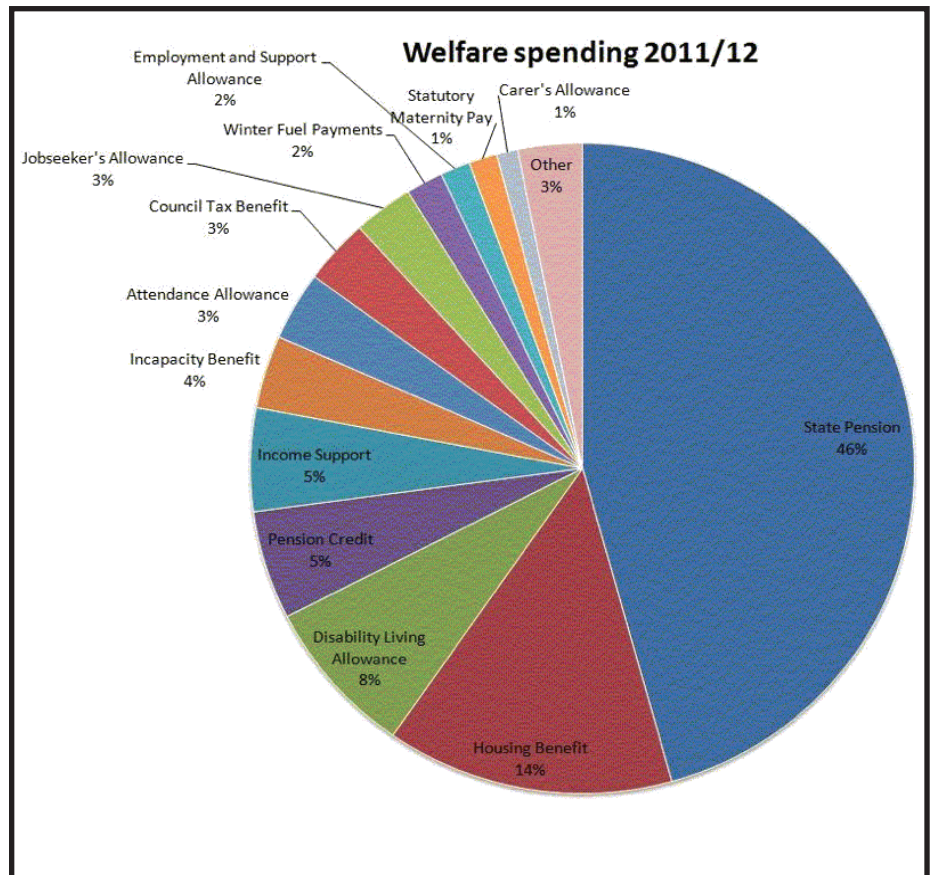
Welfare Spending - The Facts

Facts are sacred and here are some to calm the current Tory-manufactured rage and lies about benefits. The massive song and dance that this nasty Government is making is designed to disguise the fact that their economic austerity policies are crippling our economy, and that their cuts to benefits are hurting ordinary people.

Here are some real figures:

- Only 3% of the benefits budget goes to people seeking work.
- 53% is pensions and other related old age benefits.
- 18% is Housing Benefit (which currently goes directly to landlords).
- 18% is working tax credits, to give people a living wage because actual minimum wages rates are too low to raise a family on.

As you can see, the vast majority of people claiming housing and council tax benefit **ARE IN WORK**.



The figure above illustrates how Welfare Spending was broken down in the 2011/12 fiscal year

New Branch Office Location

As of July 1st, the Branch Office has moved to Room 321 in Manchester Town Hall.

We recently reached the date where we were able to exercise the "break clause" in the lease at Sunlight House. Although the office space there was good, the high cost and the possibility of an increase in rent meant that the

decision was made to move into other accommodation.

This will enable the Branch to continue to work and campaign on your behalf in these difficult times.

The Branch phone number 0161 254 7500 remains the same and you can also send a message to the Branch email address [unison@](mailto:unison@manchester.gov.uk)

manchester.gov.uk, get in touch through our online contact form at unisonmanchester.org/contact-us, or even send a tweet to @UnisonMcr.

Room 321 is on the 3rd floor on the Lloyd Street side. Pop in to say hello if you are passing and pick up some membership forms while you're here for your colleagues to join!



Margaret Thatcher 1925-2013

Margaret Thatcher was one of the most divisive, destructive but influential UK politicians of the last 100 years. To offer a little balance to the millions of words the right wing media have lavished on their heroine, UNISON Manchester offers this short reflection on the lasting damage her governments' policies caused working class people, Manchester and the UK as a whole.

It is difficult now to recall just how bleak the future appeared when Mrs Thatcher was in her prime. The Cold War was freezing in the 1980s, riots warmed the inner cities, Ghost Town by the Specials provided the soundtrack, unemployment skyrocketed, and through that entire decade that over-bearing, hectoring, prissy voice lectured us all with unswerving, fanatical belief that 'She was Right', and that 'There Is No Alternative'.

Time now allows us to judge her governments' record a little more clearly. The first point to make was that her economic policies were a disaster for working people across the UK, although they did benefit the wealthy and powerful few. Her catastrophic mis-management of the economy simply wrecked our industrial and manufacturing base.

Millions of jobs were lost in factories, shipyards, steel plants and engineering companies large and small, as she pursued economic policies that promoted the financial sector but crucified real industries and destroyed useful and productive skilled jobs, for ever – East Manchester has still not recovered from this onslaught.

Her attack on the miners and their communities was

brutal, and economically blind. Britain now expensively imports 50 million tons of coal each year to fuel power stations, and has lost the expertise it once had in clean coal technologies.

Revenues from the North Sea oil paid the benefits for millions of people who were made unemployed by such reckless policies, instead of being invested in modernising UK industry.

Her privatisation programme sold OUR utility companies for a song, and they are now in the hands of foreign owners who charge us a fortune for rip-off services we used to own and control outright. Her housing policies flogged council houses extremely efficiently, but created the present housing crisis as simply no houses were built to replace them. She made it illegal for council house sales receipts to be used to build new homes.

Social policies went backwards; Clause 28 being a case in point. According to Mrs Thatcher, Nelson Mandela was a terrorist, the fascist dictator of Chile who executed trade unionists was 'a friend of Great Britain', whilst her policies in Northern Ireland simply prolonged and worsened the troubles.

As those who used public services back in the 1980s will remember, schools, the NHS and other services were starved of resources whilst tax rates for the already wealthy were axed. Which brings us onto the monumentally stupid Poll Tax, which eventually led to her own Party metaphorically stabbing her in the front and removing her from office.

Thatcher denied there was any such thing as 'society', only individuals and families. She may have died alone at the Ritz whilst her family had long deserted her to live abroad, but we know there is still such a thing as society.

We'd like to forget all about Mrs Thatcher. But such was the suffering her policies caused and their long term effects, that it's impossible; not least when we remember she was arguably, at least partly, the midwife of New Labour.

So perhaps the best thing to do is continue to do what trade unions do best, to work together for the collective good and to help each other for a better society.

It's what she wouldn't have wanted.



Good To Meet You: Jane Wilcox

Name: Jane Wilcox

Job: Marketing Manager for Manchester City Galleries

How long have you been a member of the union?

This one? Twenty-three years.

What do you like about your role in UNISON?

Being connected to other people in other workplaces and helping to represent my colleagues beyond our workplace.

Whereabouts do you live?

West Didsbury

Where would you want to live?

I wouldn't say no to something overlooking Regent's Park or an apartment on the Place Dauphine in Paris.

Best thing about UNISON?

Its members, of course.

Who or what is your inspiration?

If I'm trying to overcome a mental block at work, I go up into the galleries to look for inspiration. The artworks draw your focus outwards, make you look at things from someone else's point of view.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

I'm too cautious.

What is the trait you most deplore in others?

Callousness.

If you were Prime Minister, what would you do first?

Resign in favour of someone better qualified! But before then I'd rescue our NHS from the clutches of greedy and incompetent



politicians before it's too late.

What superpower would you like?

Flight, preferably faster than a speeding bullet.

What's the worst job you've ever done?

Working in a very busy restaurant was the hardest job I've ever done but I enjoyed it.

What's your ideal job?

Working in an art gallery!

What's your favourite...?

Holiday – Anywhere in Italy;

Film – John Water's Serial Mom;

Drink – Red wine;

Football Team – Middlesbrough, because I grew up there.

What was your best day at work, and your worst?

Best day – Covering front of house at our Anish Kapoor exhibition and watching visitors mistrust their eyes and react in amazement. I loved talking to them about the art and sharing their responses to it.

Worst day – I've a feeling it's still to come. Ask me after this latest round of cuts has taken effect.

Why do unions matter?

Where do I start? Look at the lives of working people in places where employers and governments face no challenge from organised labour. That's what our pay and conditions would be like if we didn't unite to stand up for ourselves and each other. No one hands us our rights; we have to work together to demand them and defend them. And we should support others like us who are trying to do the same.