

MANCUNION

THE UNISON NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2013



REPORT AND PHOTOS FROM
NHS MARCH/RALLY INSIDE

On 29th September Manchester saw one of the biggest demonstrations ever seen outside London. It was a protest against attacks on our NHS and the wrecking of our society under the cloak of 'austerity'.

Over 65,000 took part in the TUC march which coincided with the start of the Tory Conference in Manchester. Hundreds of Manchester UNISON members wore specially produced t-shirts saying 'You can't trust a Tory with the NHS'. They went in 20 minutes but thankfully the rain ponchos ordered were not needed!

The demonstration showed the massive range of opposition to this Tory / Lib Dem coalition. And it also showed that there are plenty of people who will stand up to Coalition attacks on the NHS and public services in general.

The last few weeks have also seen the questioning of the link between the trade unions and the Labour Party. But let's not forget that it was unions that formed the Labour Party as a voice for working people in parliament.

Severing the link has been floated by some on the right wing of the Labour Party, particularly members of the group 'Progress' and has now been gleefully welcomed by the Tory leadership and Lib Dems who want to see the link smashed. Any alliance of interests between Conservative, Liberal Democrat and New Labour political figures has got to be troubling.

So what is Progress? They are funded mainly through large donors such as Lord Sainsbury and The British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association. They describe themselves as a 'New Labour pressure group'

and a 'members association'. However, they have their own structures and conferences and members of Progress appear to be operating a party within a party, intervening in policy and undermining the role of the trade unions.

And why is this battle within the Labour Party important? Because if working people lose what little influence they have now, then electoral politics will become even more remote from ordinary peoples' lives.

And whilst it's obvious that only the election of a Labour Government in 2015 will even begin to stop the attacks on our public services and our communities, it'll be important to ensure that our Labour Party doesn't just follow the New Labour model. Instead, it is vital that any future Labour Government listens to the

voice of working people, so now is the time for union members to join and become active in the party at all levels to ensure the views of our members and families are properly heard.

Anyone interested in getting involved in putting your views forward in The Labour Party should contact the Branch. Working together, we can beat this incompetent coalition, and put our members' concerns in determining any future Labour Government policies.

Finally a date for your diary. Your UNISON Manchester Branch AGM will be on 11th February 2014 at 12.45 at the Friends Meeting House. As ever, come along and have your say!



IN MY VIEW

PAT McDONAGH

BRANCH SECRETARY

IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue we lift the lid on one of the biggest challenges facing our union, local government pay and look back on three years of m people. There's a couple of heartening stories to keep you warm this autumn as we remember the tremendous Save the NHS march and rally and we report a little bit of good news in the Rochdale Future Directions dispute. We also say hello to new Branch Officer Carl Greatbatch in "Good to Meet You.." where Carl discusses his love of bikes and social justice and tells us why he'll never work with The Bay City Rollers again. Hope you enjoy it.

Patrick Taylor and James Crowley

Editors.

CONTACT US

Whether you have a problem at work, just need some advice or want to be more involved in the Branch, we are always eager to hear from members. To get in touch, you can call us on 0161 254 7500 or email us at unison@manchester.gov.uk.

If you want all the latest news then make sure you bookmark our website www.unisonmanchester.org. You can also follow @UnisonMcr on Twitter where we pass on all the latest news and post live updates from major UNISON events.

The branch office is now situated in Manchester Town Hall in Room 321 so feel free to pop in for a chat about any concerns.

www.unisonmanchester.org

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT PAY

So here are the facts.

- Across the 1.6 million local government workforce nationally, 77% are women.
- The local government workforce is 55% part-time workers - of which 90% are women.
- Over 1 million local government workers earn less than £21,000 a year, with around half on less than £15,000.
- Local government workers have suffered a 3 year pay freeze, followed by a measly 1% increase this year. **That is why our pay is worth 14% less than in 1999.**
- Many low paid workers will have experienced further income reductions resulting from cuts to benefits and tax credits.
- Recent pay settlements in the UK economy have been between 2 and 2.5%.
- The City Council will have shed nearly 4,000 jobs after the raft of Tory/Lib Dem cuts. This adds yet more pressure on workloads on the remaining staff.

The only sensible conclusion to draw is that this Conservative and Liberal Democrat ruling coalition is toxic for local government.

Its deep and savage cuts to local authority budgets, targeted at cities like Manchester (still a Conservative-free zone) have smashed local public services, increased unemployment and damaged our local economies.

And its pay policies are impoverishing local government workers. To recycle a phrase, we really can't go on like this.

UNISON, with the other trade unions, negotiates on pay with the national employers. It has submitted a pay claim for 2014-15 for a minimum increase of £1 an hour on each scale point.

This will result in those on the lowest rates of pay earning at least a Living Wage. It will also help restore in wages some (though not all) of the earning power lost through the pay freeze and inflation over the past four years.

It is a pay claim that is reasonable. It will help many workers and their families who are struggling on low incomes and will boost the local economy.

Unlike the bankers who caused the financial mess that this Coalition Government are forcing ordinary people to pay for, local government staff spend virtually all their wages locally.

This spend enters the local economy, multiplying economic growth and spreads the benefit more widely. A Living Wage helps employees and local economies alike.

It is also a pay claim that we will have to fight for. You can bet that Government Ministers like Eric Pickles will hate it. They won't like the fact that ordinary people and their trade unions are prepared to stand up for decent wages and for good public services.

And to win this struggle, just as the trade union movement has won many times in the past, we will need to be united, we will need to work hard for it and take strike action if necessary.

Support the campaign for a Living Wage, and please discuss it with friends and family, and with colleagues (and don't forget to ask non members to join UNISON - our campaign will boost their pay too).

There's more information as ever from Stewards, Branch Officers and the website, and we'll provide more updates in future issues.

I want to
 **live**
not just
exist

UNISON
campaigning for
a living wage

TUC SAVE OUR NHS MARCH



The 29th September proved to be a fantastic day for us and, hopefully, a lousy one for the Tories. The TUC March to Save The NHS was first mentioned at UNISON National Delegate conference back in June, with our call being backed by TUC General Secretary, Frances O'Grady.

No one could have predicted the huge scale of the March, as 65,000 people took to the streets to support the NHS, our most cherished national institution. It was the largest demonstration in Manchester's history since Peterloo.

A protest was needed too. The Tories were sitting comfortably in their seats at Manchester Central

beginning their annual conference with a tribute to Margaret Thatcher as they prepare to sell off the NHS to their cronies in private healthcare corporations.

The Manchester Branch had been gearing up for the event from day one, printing hundreds of "Never Trust a Tory with your NHS" t-shirts. Distributed in just 20 minutes they proved to be one of the abiding memories of the day with a purple t-shirt always somewhere in sight.

Here we present some of our photos from the day. If you would like to share yours with other branch members then get in touch and we can post them on our branch Flickr account.

& RALLY 29TH SEPTEMBER



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE PONCHOS?

The 29th was a very strange day in Manchester. It was warm and sunny!

We couldn't give out t-shirts fast enough, but the waterproof ponchos we ordered (just in case) proved far more difficult to shift.

On Monday morning we realised we needed to find a new use for them.

With the local elections coming up next spring we have

donated some of them to people who are out on the doorstep or leafleting in what is proving to be a very wet November.

The next Local elections provide a historic opportunity to make Manchester a Lib Dem free city. Manchester Branch has been campaigning hard for this since 2010 and we certainly aren't going to let a bit of rain hinder anyone!

M PEOPLE: THREE YEARS ON

M-people was negotiated between UNISON and other Trade Unions with the City Council, and agreed after a ballot of members in 2010. At the time, the old redeployment process was no longer working effectively and needed to be addressed. Significantly this came in the wake of a coalition government being formed by traditional Tories but aided and abetted by Liberal Democrats rapidly shifting to the right.

Experience has taught us that Tories being elected means public sector cuts. Our Branch has always been committed to a policy of no compulsory redundancies. But if that commitment was to be honoured in the face of massive cuts and economic stagnation, then a new approach was going to be needed.

The settlement was a new flexibility of working, with members agreeing a system whereby they would take on new working opportunities, potentially different to their current roles, as services were restructured or cut.

Local government funding settlements of 2011 - 2013 were devastating. They meant huge challenges for all of us, but even with the closure of large services, the Branch has been able to ensure new posts for all staff that remained with the Council. Sure Start proved to be one of the clearest examples of this principle. The Council's decision to close Sure Start centres was a sad day for our Branch and the City. However, two years on from the original announcement we are able to report that all our members have posts elsewhere in the Council, using their skills and experience in areas such as Homelessness and Troubled Families, Revenues and Benefits, with many of them taking on higher graded roles.

UNISON Manchester made sure there were safeguards for our members built into the system. We have defended the right to three years pay protection, one of the best in the country. We also recognised that members would need a right of appeal and a way to resolve issues that they may have with their new roles. The quality assurance process is unique in that it is a joint process involving the trade unions with the Quality Assurance officer being selected by the joint trade unions. This meant a change of role for former UNISON Assistant Branch Secretary Pete Banks, who now works in the town hall extension with the m people team.

Stage one appeals are handled informally with Pete often just discussing the matter with management or the issue being handled by a Branch Officer or the local steward. Of the 111 cases that have been passed to stage 2 only 13 have not been successful, with a change or amendment to the original offer. This is testament to Pete's hard work and shows the wisdom of having arranged for the Trade Unions to be involved in handling reviews of decisions.

Other UNISON members across the country have not been as fortunate with compulsory redundancies, with all too many examples throughout local government, even in traditional Tory areas which have been spared from the worst funding cuts.

By having a large, committed membership, our Branch has been able to negotiate a strong agreement with our employer, protecting ourselves from the Tory cuts and defending our members. Moving forward, we will continue to defend our commitment to no compulsory redundancies.

PETE'S VIEW

Pete Banks is the Joint Trade Union Quality Assurance Officer with the m-people team. Here is his perspective.

"The joint working approach with the Council to get us through the vicious attacks of the Tory Lib Dem coalition couldn't be more graphically demonstrated by my role representing the 3 trade unions in the Human Resources department in Chief Executives.

"For someone who has been a trade union official for more years than I care to remember, it felt pretty surreal to begin with. However, since joining the m people team as the Joint Trade Union Quality Assurance Officer in Oct 2010, it has become very clear that this has been the right approach for our members.

"My job is to listen to the concerns members have over the role they have been offered after a service redesign etc. Where possible an early resolution is sought or, where needs be, I process their review request through



to the Quality Assurance panel.

"Most cases are resolved by agreeing some changes to the specifics of the role/hours/location or recommending a new offer. It would be wrong to say all members have been happy with the process, but the vast majority have been and given the savage cuts heaped upon us that is no mean feat."

A CHINK OF LIGHT IN ROCHDALE

In our last issue we reported on the ongoing dispute between UNISON Rochdale Branch and Future Directions, the so called 'care' company wholly owned by Calderstones NHS.

Following a successful bid to provide domiciliary care in the area, Future Directions is imposing drastic cuts to terms and conditions. These include pay cuts of 28%, slashing sick pay and reducing leave to the bare legal minimum.

This has led to members employed by Future Directions taking an unprecedented 29 days of industrial action, with the strike supported as strongly on day 29 as it was on the first.

These brave members have also staged rallies and marches in Rochdale town centre, lobbied Calderstones NHS, picketed Future Directions head quarters, lobbied Rochdale Council meetings and talked at many trade union meetings, locally, regionally and nationally.

Recently Andy Taylor, UNISON steward at Future Directions, spoke at UNISON's North-West Regional Council and was able to report what he described as "a chink of light" in the dispute.

Future Directions have finally agreed to sit down with UNISON and the conciliation service ACAS. Clearly everyone is hopeful that the dispute can be resolved but it will take a considerable shift from Future Directions, both in terms of the conditions they want to impose and also their willingness to negotiate and be genuinely open about the finances involved.

Whatever the outcome, UNISON Manchester remains committed to supporting the Rochdale strikers. The



Branch has already donated £5000 to their industrial action fund and will give them further financial assistance if needed.

The Manchester Branch has also given direct support at demonstrations and lobbies. Future Directions took part in a recruitment event at Manchester Town Hall recently to attract new staff, including bank staff that they have been using to effectively scab on the dispute to cover the striking workers.

Our activists leafleted outside the Town Hall to raise awareness of the dispute, including letting prospective recruits know what kind of employer they would be joining. We got a really positive reaction from people attending the event. It's good to know that even in really hard economic times, Mancunians have no desire to fill the job of a striking worker.

CHANGES AT THE BRANCH OFFICE

We have a new full-time officer in post.

Carl Greatbatch has recently been elected as an Assistant Branch Secretary by your Branch Executive Committee.

Carl is a long serving UNISON activist both here in Manchester and previously in Yorkshire. He will be responsible for Corporate Services in the City Council, The Manchester College and the Museums among other areas.

If you want to find out more about what makes Carl tick, check out "Good to meet you" at the back of this issue.

Carl takes over from Patrick Taylor who has stood down and taken up a new post in the Council's Digital Communications team.

Patrick says "I'd really like to thank everyone in the Branch for their support over the past two years. It's been a great privilege."

I'd also like to say I was really pleased to see Carl elected to replace me; he'll be a great Branch Officer and I wish him the best of luck."

GOOD TO MEET YOU...

Name: Carl Greatbatch

Job: Assistant Branch Secretary

How long have you been a member of the union?

Five years in Manchester & four years previously in West Yorkshire.

What do you like about your role in UNISON?

The chance to ensure that our members are treated fairly and equitably in their dealings with management.

Whereabouts do you live?

The people's republic of Levenshulme!

Where would you want to live?

I'm perfectly happy where I am.

Best thing about UNISON?

Because of its size Unison is perfectly positioned to defend workers' rights, defend its members against unfair practice and negotiate with the employers to mitigate the worst effects of the current politically inspired butchery of local services.

Who or what is your inspiration?

The 1945 Labour government. It genuinely changed the UK for the better and the reactionaries & right wingers in this country are still fighting against its successes seventy years on.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

Impatience.

What is the trait you most deplore in others?

Selfishness & disinterest in others.

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

Remove all private enterprise from the NHS and re-nationalise the railways and local transport.

What superpower would you like?

The power to crush the oppressors!

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

My worst job was as a roadie on a Bay City Rollers tour in the mid-nineties where I had to spend night after night defending the band against the amorous attentions of



Carl gets revved up to smash the oppressors

their fans.

What's your ideal job?

My ideal job would somehow have to involve motorbikes and social justice!

Favourite holiday destination, film, drink, football club?

Venice, The Big Lebowski, Islay Whisky, Port Vale.

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

The best days have been those when I've managed to support someone when they've needed it. The worst are when I've run headlong into walls of bureaucracy and ill-thought out reforms, re-structures and re-designs.

Why do unions matter?

Because all of the rights that have been won historically by union action are at genuine risk of being rolled back by this ConDem government.