

Midlands TUC Update

December 2015

Articles

- #HeartUnions 8-14 February: Frances O'Grady
- Protect the Right to Strike
- Reps Awards Night: 27 November
- Equalities Conference: 31 October
- Dying to Work
- Living Wage Week: 1-7 November
- Chainmakers
- Health and Safety forum launch: 3 December
- Young Workers ice hockey: November 7
- Putting Pensions Right Conference: October 1
- Pensioners Network update

#HeartUnions 8-14 February



This government is determined to shift the balance of power in the workplace in favour of employers, and get the Trade Union Bill through Parliament with as little scrutiny as possible. We must not let them get away with it.

It is essential that we keep up the pressure as the Bill enters its critical House of Lords stage.

The House of Lords committee and report

stages (likely to occur early next year) are the best chance to secure changes to the Trade Union Bill.

We need to keep the Bill at the front of politicians and journalists' minds and to remind people why unions are so important.

From the **8 to 14 of February** the TUC will run a special week of activities throughout England and Wales to showcase the amazing work unions do. This will provide a way to increase the involvement of you as union members in the campaign, build awareness of the Trade Union Bill and tell positive union stories to the wider public.

More information will be provided over the coming weeks at heartunions.org and we want as many of you to get involved as possible.

If you want to highlight the great work done by unions and reps where you work and live, please get in touch with Kathleen Christie at kchristie@tuc.org.uk

The Trade Union Bill has no place in a modern democracy. Only through coming together and showing our united strength will we be able to defend our vital right to strike.

Frances O'Grady is TUC General Secretary

 **UNIONS**
8-14 FEBRUARY 2016

Midlands TUC Update



Throughout the autumn, the Midlands TUC has been involved in 16 separate events taking the campaign against the Trade Union Bill to towns and cities across the region.

- Birmingham
- Bromsgrove
- Chesterfield
- Coventry
- Dudley
- East Staffs
- Leicester
- Lincoln
- Newcastle-Under-Lyme
- Northampton
- North Staffs
- Nottingham
- Telford
- Stoke Central
- Wolverhampton
- Worcester



The two main 'regional' events, Nottingham and Birmingham attracted over 100 people, with the other 'satellite' events taking place to ensure as many people as possible have been able to attend.



In addition a national demonstration was held at the Tory Party conference on 4th

October and thousands attended from the Midlands Region.

A hugely successful national rally and lobby of Parliament was held on Monday 2nd November.



In the run up to the lobby the Midlands TUC met with Political Officers from unions and coordinated lobbying activity with some target MPs.

The TUC welcomed the government climb down on the social media aspect of the Bill, but warned of the other aspects of the Bill which breach civil liberties.



Midlands TUC Update

2015 Reps Awards Night

On November 27, 200 people attended the fourth Midlands TUC Reps Awards Night to celebrate the work and achievement of trade union reps in the region.



In addition to the awards presentations, which are detailed below, the evening included a presentation about the Dying to Work campaign. Moreover, an 'Outstanding Contribution' award was presented to Jacci Woodcock, the union member who has been the driving force behind the campaign.

We are again grateful for the support of our sponsors, without whom we would not be able to put on the Awards. Companies that share our values, companies that are truly part of the trade union movement. So, our thanks go to **Pellacraft** for providing the Awards for the night, **Thompsons Solicitors** and **Simpson Millar Solicitors** for the sponsorship of specific awards and to **Matt Jones** for the sponsorship of the photography.



Andy Becker Student Award for Trade Union Education

Wayne Kidger of the **GMB** picked up the 2015 Andy Becker Student Award for Trade Union Education. Wayne has undertaken as much union education as possible, growing in confidence and this year made his maiden speech at GMB conference which helped change union policy.

Campaigning Rep

The 2015 Midlands TUC Campaigning Rep of the Year went to **Dionne Lawton** from **UCATT** for her campaigning work that built widespread support both in the workplace and wider communities for industrial action to defend terms and conditions at her workplace.

The Highly Commended Certificate went to **Claire Eldridge** from the **BDA** for her work in raising member concern and recruiting new members and reps to the union since assuming a regional rep role in 2015.



Midlands TUC Update

Communications Rep



The 2015 Midlands TUC Communications Rep of the Year went to **Helen Wilson** from



UNISON for transforming her branch website, securing email or mobile numbers for 95% of the branch membership and for establishing simple and precise protocols for the induction and mentoring of new reps.



The Highly Commended Certificate went to **Sarah James** of the **GMB** for her imaginative use of communication that helped to recruit members to her branch as well as running the social media pages for the union's regional women's group.

Health & Safety Rep



Mike Maley from **UNISON** was awarded the 2015 Midlands TUC Health & Safety Rep of the Year for his efforts in integrating Health and Safety into the organising strategy of his branch, understanding the importance of good training and support to ensure the branch has competent well-motivated activists.

Jane Johnson and **Ray Beekman** of the **GMB** were the joint winners of the Highly Commended Certificate.



Jane delivered increased union membership as a result of her work on lone working policies, improvements to PPE and extra staff training. Ray has a particular interest in asbestos and his campaigning activities have included the delivery of 'asbestos awareness' training courses and fundraising £1000 for the Derbyshire Asbestos Support Team.

Mary MacArthur Equalities Rep



The 2015 Midlands TUC Equalities Rep of the Year went to the **Birmingham Organised Sister Society – BOSS**. BOSS is a self-organised women's group that have raised £1300 for a women's shelter, collected toys and clothes and provided computers to help women write CVs

Midlands TUC Update

and look for work. They also arranged for a union recognised company to donate plates and mugs to the shelter. They have recently started a new campaign, collecting bras for sisters in Africa.



Sally Goodwin of the **RCM** picked up the Highly Commended Certificate for helping Midwives and Maternity Support Workers overcome barriers to individual and collective learning needs. Her holistic approach to learning enabled the workforce to collectively meet their learning needs whilst delivering benefits to her union's members as well as staff in the NHS and women.

Organising Rep



Kevin Davies from the **CWU** was awarded the 2015 Organising Rep of the year for his work in leading 50 recruitment events over the last 12 months which has resulted in the recruitment of over 2000 new members, including approximately 300 apprentices.



The Highly Commended Certificate went to **Mark Gould** of the **GMB** for his work in increasing membership from 30 to nearly 150 presently, a density level of around 80%.

Union Learning Rep

The 2015 Midlands TUC Union Learning Rep of the Year went to **Jenny Brown** from **UNISON** for helping over 150 members access learning opportunities over the past year and securing a 'Learning Agreement' between the union and employer



Steve Croke of the **CWU** was awarded the Highly Commended Certificate. Steve left school with few qualifications but through workplace learning he now has a degree in Trade Union Studies. He has been inspiring others to access learning opportunities.



Midlands TUC Update

Campaign of the Year

The 2015 Campaign of the Year went to ‘Save Birmingham Youth Service’ organised by UNITE Reps at Birmingham City Council for their campaigning to minimise cuts to the Youth Service in Birmingham. The imaginative and constant campaigning has meant that Birmingham City Council have moderated cuts to the Youth Service for the next two years – the only Council in the West Midlands to have done so.



The 2015 Midlands TUC Campaign of the Year award was collected by **Chris Seeley, Claire Hughes, Tom Muirhead and Adil Hadi**

The Highly Commended Certificate was collected by **Rachel Pincher** representing the **GMB** for the ‘Change for Workers in the Care Sector’ for the campaign focussing on delivering positive change in the Care Sector.



The main message of the campaign has been to;

- increase the minimum hourly rate within the sector to at least the Living Wage
- to be registered as a skilled profession nationally
- instigate minimum standards for training
- Agree a national ratio of staff to residents.

Midlands TUC Update



Midlands TUC Update



Midlands TUC Update



Midlands TUC Update



Midlands TUC Update



Midlands TUC Update



Equalities Conference

The first Midlands TUC Equalities Conference was held on 31 Saturday in Birmingham and was attended by just over 100 delegates. It was Chaired by **Kate Hudson**, CWU Regional Secretary and Vice-Chair of the Midlands TUC.

Lee Barron, Midlands TUC Regional Secretary said that “Equalities is at the heart of the movement and that it is the first place where employers look for cutbacks. We will put equalities on our agenda.”

The recently elected MP for Yardley, **Jess Phillips**, addressed the conference about the issues facing women in politics. Jess pointed out that 36% of MPs are women and that there are more men in the House of Commons today than there have ever been female MPs in history.

‘It isn’t easy being a woman in politics, the barriers women face are structural’ she said. Beyond the House of Commons, the levels of female involvement at all levels in the political world are underrepresented with just 11% of local authority leaders being female.



Jess went on to make a passionate defence of tax credits highlighting that 24,000 children in her constituency would be affected by their loss. She dismissed the government’s argument that tax credits stop ambition by pointing out that she and two other female MPs had previously lived on tax

credits and that it didn’t stop them having ambition and insisted that ‘it is important to have women from all walks of life represented in Parliament.’

The conference heard that she had recently been the victim of vile online abuse for her recent suggestion that there wasn’t a need for a specific International Men’s Day debate in the House of Commons due to the present male

representation in Parliament. However, on a more positive note, Jess said that it had been a privilege to take part in the ‘Tampon Tax’ to push for the abolition of the 5% VAT levy on female sanitary products.

Gethin Roberts from Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) insisted that this year’s Birmingham Pride, with a huge trade union block, has provided the template for future Pride events. Speaking about his involvement with LGSM Gethin insisted that the LGBT community had always been a part of the union movement and have always played a leading role.



Referring to the hit film, *Pride*, that was inspired by LGSM, Gethin referred to the famous comment that “the worker must have bread,

but she must have roses, too”. And that the campaign for LGBT rights should be linked to the campaign for greater equality and for social justice for all working people.

Indeed, over the last 12 months LGSM had been making links with LGBT activists involved in both the Ritzy Living Wage campaign and the National Gallery dispute.

He went onto comment that it was the values of social justice that inspired the LGSM to form in 1984/85, the same values that drove the group to reform in 2014 and is the driving force behind a whole new generation of young activist getting engaged.

Midlands TUC Update



Wilf Sullivan, the TUC's Race Equality Officer insisted that the Trade Union Bill was an equalities issue, because the Bill will make it far more difficult

for working people to address discrimination issues in the workplace.

He went on to highlight the high levels of black youth unemployment and warned that 'there should be a big red light flashing in government about the fact that so many young black men are unemployed...if you push people against a wall they will have no where else to go and will fight back.'

Furthermore, if the government abolish the Public Sector Equality Duty, this will reduce ability of unions to tackle discrimination in the workplace. On immigration Wilf suggested that the language surrounding the topic shows how easily we are slipping into measures that undermine the civil rights of all. In concluding, Wilf urged that issues of equality are collective not individual and that we should be putting equalities at the heart of collective bargaining.



Rob Smith and Balbir Bird from Thompsons Solicitors provided an Equality Law briefing and suggested that 2010 was the 'high tide' in terms of equalities and that we have been on a

'tricky road' ever since. Measures such as the change to two year qualifying periods for unfair dismissal, the repeal of third party harassment and the introduction of tribunal fees have had a detrimental impact. Indeed, the introduction of

tribunal fees has seen tribunal claims fall through the floor with a 52% fall in claims in 2013/14 and with further declines since.

The University of Birmingham lecturer, **Andy Hodder** addressed the conference about the need to prioritise young worker organising initiatives to counter the fact that just 7% of 16-24yr olds are presently in a union. He also said that it was 'wrong to prioritise young workers to build the unions for tomorrow, young workers are workers today.'



He went on to state that whilst young workers have distinct issues they cut across all equality issues and therefore unions should seek to not pigeon hole young workers. To build stronger unions young people need to be involved directly in organising and building all campaigns. It is 'rubbish' that young people are not interested in politics, but we have to remember that young people are not a homogenous group and that unions need to be smart and strategic with campaigns.



Sarah Worth from the Midlands TUC Young Workers network then went on to outline how the network has been reimagined over the last six months.

In recognising the fundamental challenge facing unions in organising young workers, the network has sought to bring together young activists and members to discuss how unions can better reach out to young workers, make themselves more relevant and welcoming and ensure that young workers are at the heart of union structures.



As a result of fundraising undertaken by the Midlands LGBT and

Midlands TUC Update

Disability networks on World Aids Day, a cheque for £1325 was presented to **Trade Sexual Health** by **Alex DeWinter** and **Lee Barron** to help support their work in providing support to people with HIV and in challenging the stigma that surrounds HIV



Sandra Durkin, from the BPTUA, then addressed the conference about the Touchstone publication

'young against old?' She said that 'my generation may be last to do better than my parents generation' which poses a real challenge for young people. However 'there is inequality across all generations, it's not a battle between generations.'

Rather than fanning the flames of generational hostility the focus should be on improving investment in skills, increasing the National Minimum Wage, extending pay bargaining, introducing decent job guarantee schemes, reducing student debt & improving access to housing.



Councillor **Judy Foster** outlined how Dudley Council is now promoting facility time through equalities. Judy insisted that 'trade unions are a force for good. An effective council is when we have management and well resourced unions

working together' and the 'facility time for trade union reps an investment to tackle discrimination.'

A question and answer session was then held with a panel of representatives from all the Midlands TUC equality groups where they outlined their future priorities and campaigns.

The conference concluded with a presentation about the Dying to Work campaign.

Dying to Work Campaign



The Dying to Work campaign is gathering momentum.



Over the Autumn we have been over to the European Parliament to meet with the Intra Trade Union Group of MEP's who gave the campaign support. An amendment has been secured to a European Directive

on Health & Safety which gave us an opportunity to mention terminal illness.



Breast Cancer UK are now supporting the campaign and the NUT, NASUWT, SoR and the RCM are the latest affiliates to be supporting the campaign.

A lunch time briefing was organised at Congress House and a fringe meeting was organised at the East Midlands Labour Party conference.

Midlands TUC Update

Supportive campaign pictures have been secured with various MPs and the Labour Leader and Deputy Leader

A new set of campaign materials will be produced in the New Year and a fresh round of opinion polling undertaken as the campaign moves onto the next stage in building the necessary coalition to change legislation

For more information about the campaign visit www.dyingtowork.co.uk

Living Wage Week

During Living Wage Week in November, the Midlands TUC joined up with Citizens UK, Birmingham to press the case for the Living Wage.



The new Living Wage Rate was announced on 2 November and is now £8.25 (outside London). As part of the week we visited employers who pay the Living Wage.

The campaign for Aston Villa to commit to paying the Living Wage was also highlighted during the week and the pressure will continue to mount on football clubs to pay the Living Wage.



Chainmakers Update

Saturday 2 July has been agreed as the date for the 2016 Chainmakers Festival.



The Mary Macarthur lecture will take place at the culmination of the regional “Women at Work Week” on **Friday 4 March**.

The writer and Guardian Columnist, **Polly Toynbee** will be providing the 2016 lecture.

To reserve your place please contact Michelle Kesterton on mkesterton@tuc.org.uk or 0121 236 4454.

We are now inviting musicians to apply to play at the festival. Priority will be given to performers who are Musicians’ Union members or members of a trade union for their job.

To apply to play at the festival please email Michelle Kesterton at mkesterton@tuc.org.uk by the end of **January 2016**. In your application please include the following:

- A brief biography of you/your band
- A link to a sample of your music
- A paragraph outlining your commitment to the trade union movement



Health & Safety Forum Launch, 3 December



Following on from our Health and Safety Conference earlier this year, the Midlands TUC launched our Health & Safety Forum on 3 December.

The Forum agenda included a briefing from Thompsons Solicitors on health & safety changes in legislation, Hilda Palmer from National Hazards and Ivan Timpson from Unite the Union on Workers' Memorial Day.

It is our intention to hold at least two forum meetings each year in addition to the Regional Health & Safety Conference.

Young Workers – Ice Hockey, 7 November



To coincide with Young Workers Month the Young Workers Forum held a social and organising meeting on Saturday 7 November.

During the meeting the young workers discussed a number of topics. A summary of the discussion is outlined below:

Have you had any issues at work? If so, what were these issues?

- Low-pay and in particular being paid the minimum wage. This and insecure work had led members to feel like they could not get on with their lives – they don't feel like they can go and buy a property or rent a home. A couple of members said they felt like they were still living at home because pay is so poor and their current job and pay doesn't match their qualifications.
- Problems with workload – this was particularly highlighted by a young teacher. There is a lot of pressure and stress on newly qualified teachers and often senior management don't recognise this. This has led to mental health problems for young teachers and some young teachers leaving the profession.

Considering your personal expectations from your union, have you been satisfied with the service received? If not, how could the service be improved?

- One young worker commented that her positive experience of union organisation was based upon the fact that she had easy access to local organisers and her local branch. However, she knew of stewards that hadn't got easy access to branch and felt isolated from support and the union structure.
- Other comments suggested that members were only accessing union services when they needed them and that didn't think too much about the union in the meantime.

How many young members / activists do you know?

- One member knew other young members through a young member's forum but everyone else knew very few or no other young members.

Midlands TUC Update

In what ways could we improve our relevance to young workers?

- Focus on issues that affect young people: temporary jobs, zero-hours contracts, low-pay, lack of opportunities, training and bullying.
- Make more people aware of what a union is and why they should join – go back to basics.
- Regular correspondence through the post and update what's on offer to members.
- Realise that moving into a new career very challenging and put support structures in place.



Are you aware of your union structures? Do you think these are good / supportive? How can these structures be adapted to be more welcoming/appealing and inclusive?

A variety of views were expressed including:

- Not completely aware of the structures and feel they could be more pro-active in tackling issues in the workplace. A positive aspect in teaching is that all the unions offer free membership to NQTs.
- Aware of structures and the help and support available but feel that a younger face would help recruit.
- Aware of structures but only because they're involved as a steward. Feel that

outsiders will find it unclear and daunting. Feel that unions need to be better at getting in touch with new members to get them involved.

- Only know their rep. More events like this would be good – more social aspect.



Does your Union have a Young Workers/Members officer?

- Most don't know – a couple said yes.

The forum will be meeting soon to plan activity for the coming year with initial ideas surrounding a survey of young members, mental health event and a football social event to coincide with the European Championships in the Summer.

To find out more about the network and to get involved please contact Sarah Worth at Sarah.Worth@gmb.org.uk

Sarah Worth GMB & Jordan Stapleton,
UNISON



Putting Pensions Right Conference

On International Day for Older People, 1st October, the Midlands TUC Pensioners Committee, in conjunction with the British Pensioners Trade Union Action Association, held the 'Putting Pensions Right' conference in Coventry to raise awareness about the problems facing pensioners and to confront the myths surrounding pensions and older people.

Rob Johnston, the Midlands TUC Policy and Campaigns Officer, told the conference that “we have to fight the myth of inter-generational unfairness, the idea that pensioners are rich while young people are poor and that we should take money away from older people to make life better for young people.

“There are enormous differences between rich pensioners and poorer pensioners. For instance, the 75-84 year age group comprises six per cent of the richest decile and the six per cent of the poorest decile. The focus should be on inequality not a generational battle.

“It’s also a myth that pensioners have escaped from the government’s cuts. The ‘triple lock’ on the state pension only looks relatively generous due to the appalling squeeze on wages, whilst a quarter of all social security cuts implemented between 2010 and 2016/17 will fall on pensioner families with a large proportion of the losses due to the change from RPI the lower CPI measure of inflation.

“The so called freedom to cash in pensions at 55 was introduced without consultation and has many dangers. A different approach would be to help people towards sensible good value solutions that give them a sustainable income in retirement, provide insurance so they don’t run out of money if they live longer than expected and, ideally, are collective schemes so that investment risk, longevity risk can be shared and costs are kept to a minimum.

“On the positive side, auto-enrolment has been

a success, with opt out rates at just 10% . This has started to reverse the long-term decline in participation in workplace pension schemes. Nevertheless, challenges still remain with five million workers, the majority of them women, currently excluded from auto-enrolment. The DWP will be reviewing auto-enrolment in 2017 and this is an opportunity for us to outline how auto-enrolment can be improved.”

The conference also heard about a new TUC report into which highlighted the disparities with healthy life expectancy in the region, showing that the lowest healthy life expectancies were to be found in areas of greatest need. The figures also demonstrate that many people will now be retiring after the average healthy life expectancy age.

The [Healthy Life Expectancy](https://www.tuc.org.uk/economic-issues/pensions-and-retirement/report-st...) report can be viewed at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/economic-issues/pensions-and-retirement/report-st...>

Pam Flynn of the National Assembly of Women (NAW) said that the pension gap between men & women across Europe was now 39%. She added: “Those fortunate to work for employers with occupational pension schemes have often had to give up pay rises to keep their jobs.

“Cashing in pension pots is the biggest con of all. Up to three-quarters of monies withdrawn will be taxable. This is nothing more than a tax fishing exercise.”

She also said “We need a review of pensions that deals with issues such as low pay, broken employment records and maternity leave.

“We need to remember that the Pensions Act is designed to be cost neutral. However, by 2040 only 35% of pensions will be better off, 20% will be the same while 45% will be worse off,” she concluded.

Sandra Durkin of British Pensioners Trade Union Action Association (BPTUAA) endorsed the TUC document [“Young against Old – What’s really causing wealth inequality?”](#) urging delegates to beware of government attempts at

Midlands TUC Update

divide and rule. She warned: “The current generation of pensions are the last that will be better off than when their parents were in retirement.

“Young peoples’ ability to save has been considerably reduced – and even young professionals are having difficulties paying into their occupational pension schemes.

“The real reason for OAPs’ wealth is down to the massive increase in house prices. However, not all pensions own their own home. What is needed is to increase young peoples’ earnings via proper skills training as this will enable them to get highly paid jobs. Current government rules prevent this as if you want to go on a Level 3 course and are aged over 24 then you have to take out an Adult Learning Loan.

“There also needs to be better pay bargaining and job guarantee schemes that work. The tax system should be linked to wealth, not just to income.”

The “*Young against Old – What’s really causing wealth inequality?*” Touchstone pamphlet can be viewed at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/economic-issues/touchstone-pamphlets/young-again...>

Pensioners Network - update

Fair Funding for Social Care was the main topic at the Pensioners’ Network meeting in November. Harry Harris GMB, addressed the meeting following his union’s successful motion to TUC Congress in September.

With nearly all social care in the private sector, Harry highlighted the precarious financial position of many of the companies that run care homes. A steady stream of homes are closing and there is a race to bottom to save money. Private ownership discourages whistleblowing and inhibits media scrutiny.

In the United Kingdom, 400,000 people live in care homes. The result of the General Election means that, in England at least, there no prospect of an end to the crisis in social care.

The network’s next meeting will be its annual general meeting on **16 March**. The network meets three times a year, generally in Derby. We welcome delegates from affiliated unions and trades union councils. Our aims are to build support among pensioners for trades unionism and the TUC’s campaigns and to support and co-ordinate the work of unions’ retired members’ groups.

Keeping in touch

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