

Midlands TUC Update

March 2015

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From the Regional Secretary

The TUC in the Midlands has had a flying start to the year. A successful conference was held at the end of February at the conclusion of our Fair Pay Fortnight. The conference had keynote speeches from our General Secretary, Frances O'Grady, Tom Jones from Thompsons Solicitors, Terry Renshaw from the Shrewsbury 24 campaign and Tom Watson MP. The conference was a huge success with motions being discussed and debated along with Q&A for the panel of speakers.

Following on from Fair Pay Fortnight we organised our regional Women at Work Week, including the inaugural Mary Macarthur lecture. This newsletter details our activity over this busy period.

Over the coming months we have further events including our Midlands Regional Trades Council conference being held at the Unite East Midlands Office in Pride Park, Derby on 28th March 2015.

This will be followed by a Health & Safety conference being held in conjunction with West Midlands Hazards Trust and Derbyshire Asbestos Support Team (DAST) to coincide with Workers Memorial Day on 28th April 2015. The Health & Safety conference is being held at the Unite Office, Broad Street, Birmingham.

The next two months will be some of the most interesting times in a generation as we face a general election that has so many repercussions for our movement and the people we represent.

Our Regional Council being held on 16th May will be pivotal in discussing the implications for our public services following that election and I hope that colleagues will be able to join us in analysing the outcomes and looking ahead to the future.

Lee Barron



Fair Pay Fortnight



Working people in the UK are seeing their living standards squeezed harder and harder every year. The cost of energy, food and housing is soaring but wages aren't keeping up.

People have lost over £4,000 since 2009 and while jobs may be returning to the economy they're increasingly low paid, low hours and low security.

That's why the TUC coordinated Fair Pay Fortnight and that's why Britain needs a pay rise.

Living Wage statistics

During Fair Pay Fortnight it was revealed that over half of jobs in some parts of the Midlands pay less than the living wage.

TUC analysis of official figures from the House of Commons Library shows that nationally one in five jobs pays under the living wage. Across the country, more than five million people get paid less than the living wage.

Birmingham Northfield tops the Living Wage blackspot across the entire UK, with a staggering 53.4% of jobs paying below the Living Wage. In the East Midlands, Bolsover tops the list of living wage blackspots with 33.7% of the jobs

based there paying less than the living wage.



Extending the living wage is a vital step towards tackling the growing problem of in-work poverty in the Midlands. Working families have experienced the biggest squeeze on their living standards since Victorian times, and these living wage figures show that women are disproportionately affected. Pay has been squeezed at all levels below the boardroom, and the government's mantra about 'making work pay' is completely out of touch with reality.

On the upside however, the number of living wage employers is growing rapidly and unions are playing their part in encouraging more employers to sign up and pay it. But we need to see a far wider commitment to pay the living wage from government, employers and modern wages councils – to drive up productivity and set higher minimum rates in industries where employers can afford to pay their staff more.

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Wage fall statistics

A new study looking into the wage crisis also highlighted how average pay has fallen across the Midlands in real terms – over £500 in the East Midlands and over £1,000 in the West Midlands.

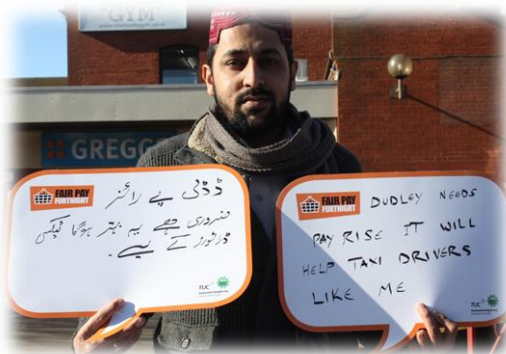
This means that the average full-time employee wage in the West Midlands has fallen in real terms by £2,430 since 2010 – over £45 a week; with East Midlands wages falling in real terms by £2,652 since 2010 – £51 a week.

Both the extent of poverty pay and the dramatic falls in wages really demonstrated the importance of Fair Pay Fortnight this year and why unions were out and about campaigning for a better, fairer deal for working people.

Street Stalls

The TUC joined affiliates and trades councils in taking the message about the need for a pay rise into communities by holding a series of street stalls across the region.

Stalls and leafleting sessions were held in Brierley Hill, Matlock, Halesowen, Swadlincote, Worcester and Coventry.



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Citizens UK

During Fair Pay Fortnight the Midlands TUC teamed up with both Birmingham and Nottingham Citizens.

In Nottingham, the TUC organised a 'Fair Share for Care' event, where the chronic levels of low pay, under investment and exploitation are having a devastating impact.

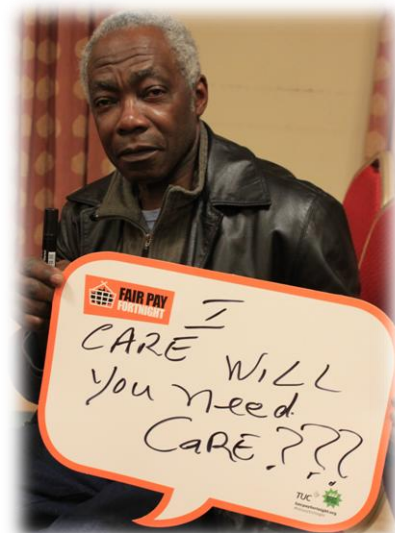
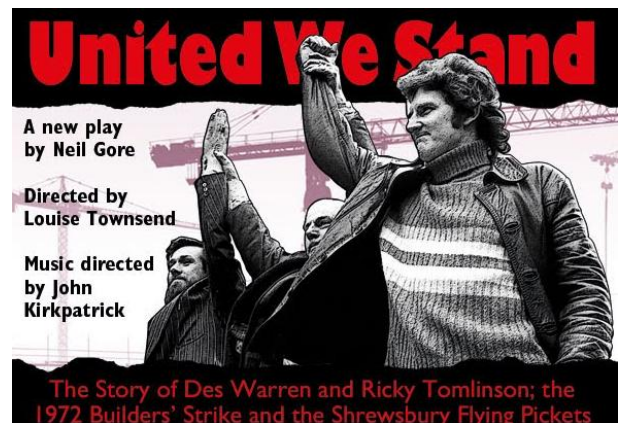


Meanwhile, the TUC joined Citizens UK Birmingham in a campaign action to visit employers that pay the Living Wage, to thank them for committing to the Living Wage and to encourage other employers to sign up as part of the drive to make Birmingham a Living Wage city.



United We Stand

The Midlands TUC also held a Fair Pay Fortnight stall at the Derby production of 'United We Stand', a powerful play depicting the 1972 builders strike and the ongoing attempts to secure justice.



AGM



champion for working people over the last two years. Eleanor now takes up a Vice-Chair position.

Further thanks are in order to Andrew Lloyd from PCS for his tireless work as Vice-Chair over the last few years.

And finally, a warm welcome to Kate Hudson from the CWU as an incoming Vice-Chair and to the new Chair, Joe Morgan of the GMB.



Fair Pay Fortnight was rounded off with the Midlands Annual General Meeting.

The meeting was addressed by

- TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady
- Campaigning MP Tom Watson
- Tom Jones from Thompsons solicitors
- Terry Renshaw from the Shrewsbury 24 campaign.

A full agenda gave rise to great debate, raising awareness of the issues felt by working people across the Midlands and inspiring talk about how we campaign to secure improvements in our region.

We would like to place on record thanks to Eleanor Smith for her time as Chair of the Regional Council. Eleanor has proven to be an unflagging



Women at Work Week

Following on from Fair Pay Fortnight, the Midlands TUC organised our regional "Women at Work Week" to coincide with the run up to International Women's Day on 8th March.

Bank of England

To start the week, the Midlands TUC was joined by affiliates to meet with the regional representative from the Bank of England.

A briefing paper was provided outlining how women have been disproportionately hit by austerity and are struggling to make ends meet in the increasingly casualised, insecure work that the economy is generating.

TUED Women's Equality course: "Equality – still on the horizon"

On Thursday 5th March, the Midlands TUC organised women's equality courses in TUED centres in Leicester, Nottingham and Solihull.



In addition an event was also held at Leicester College which saw more than 500 ESOL learners come together to enjoy performances and talks from students and guests.

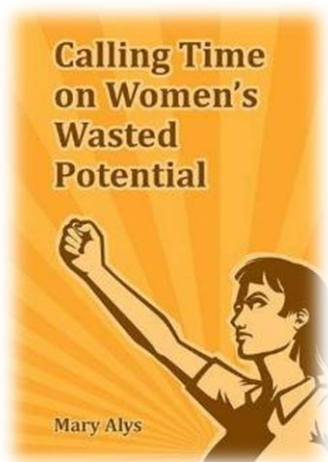
Focussing on their work around ESOL, Lisa Stones from unionlearn spoke about the work of unionlearn, the challenges women face in the workplace and how unionlearn is campaigning for higher level apprenticeships, and challenging gender stereotypes.



Lisa also paid tribute to her late colleague Mary Alys who had worked at the college prior to her time with TUC. Mary had worked at Charles Keene College (which was later incorporated into Leicester College).



“Calling Time on Women’s Wasted Potential” - Mary Alys book launch



Mary finished writing her book just three days before she passed away. The Midlands TUC is committed to promoting the book as a resource on equality courses.



Coinciding with World Book Day on 5th March, over 40 people attended the launch of Mary Alys’ book, “*Calling Time on Women’s Wasted Potential*”.

Speakers included Lee Barron, TUC Midlands Regional Secretary, who provided an outline about Mary and her work with the TUC/unionlearn. Cheryl Pidgeon, a previous TUC Regional Secretary, spoke about the importance of women getting involved in public life, whilst Councillor Sue Barton talked about the history of women getting the right to vote.

The book is available to purchase at £2.50 (cost price). To purchase a copy or to find out more about the Mary Alys Trust please email info@themaryalystrust.org.uk.

Finally, please do tweet how you have used the book to @InfoCallingTime.

Councillor Adam Clarke then spoke about the campaign to secure a statue of Alice Hawkins, a suffragette from Leicester, and highlighted the values she shared with Mary. The evening was rounded off by Lorraine Mirham who talked about Mary’s journey, both from a personal point of view, her career and her involvement with WILPF.



Inaugural Mary Macarthur Lecture



TUC General Secretary, Frances O'Grady, gave the inaugural Mary Macarthur lecture in the Black Country on 6th March.

The Mary Macarthur lecture was conceived to provide an opportunity for thoughtful comment about the challenges facing women in the workplace and wider society. It has also formed part of the plans to extend Chainmakers throughout the year. Therefore, in addition to the summer festival and the 'Mary Macarthur Award' the Mary Macarthur lecture is now firmly established in the calendar.

Speaking to a sell-out capacity audience Frances warned that many women in the Midlands are at risk of being left behind as they risk becoming trapped in in-work poverty:

"Here in Rowley Regis over two-fifths of female workers earn less than the living wage. Try telling them the recovery is fair, when they are struggling make ends meet and pay the bills.

"Women are being employed on poverty pay across the West Midlands, as many find themselves trapped in insecure work.

"We need to rediscover the spirit of the Chainmakers if the rewards of growth are to be shared more fairly. In this new era of zero-hours contracts and casualisation, collective bargaining has never been more important. Without a better deal for women and stronger unions, millions of low-paid workers will continue to be left behind."



The evening was chaired by Sylvia Heal, a long standing supporter of the Chainmakers.



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The Question and Answer session also saw two local PPCs, Steph Peacock and Natasha Millward join the panel.

And finally, a special thanks to the Friends of the Chainmakers group who provided a stall and continue their great effort in building support and awareness for the Chainmakers legacy.

Midlands TUC Women's Committee

To mark International Women's Day and as part of the "Women at Work Week", the Midlands TUC Women's Committee held a street stall in Coventry to promote the benefits of trade union membership.



The group also handed out leaflets to the public to promote the 'Reclaim The Night' march in Coventry the same evening.

Trade Union Education update

TUC Education continues to provide comprehensive training on its core and affiliate programme using the trade union education centres throughout the region, as well through the WEA.

Unfortunately due to circumstances

beyond the control of the regional TUC Derby College made the decision to close their trade union education unit.



However, Derby College have agreed to honour all of their ongoing commitments. Whilst the news of the Derby is devastating there will be continued TUC and affiliate education provided by the trade union studies unit at Central College Nottingham.

Budgetary decisions by the government continue to apply pressure to the Further Education (FE) sector and TUC Education is not exempt from these pressures.

The Midlands TUC Women at Work Week saw a number of events throughout the region in particular the involvement of three Trade Union Education centres, Central College Nottingham, Solihull and Derby in the delivery of a very successful one day course for women trade unionists.

Below is a report from Helen Nolan, a tutor at Nottingham about the day:

"Women Trade Unionists from around the Midlands were invited to get together on Thursday 5th March 2015 to celebrate International Women's Day. The Trade Union Education team in the East Midlands, based at Central

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College Nottingham, hosted the largest of 3 TUC events and were delighted to welcome 22 women from PCS, UNISON, Unite and UCU.



It was a busy day; the overall aim was to look at the position of women in work and in trade unions, but also to touch on how unions can be instrumental in improving the prospects of women in society too. The participants were buzzing and full of ideas as they worked together on case studies relating to domestic violence, women's health and safety, sexism and improving the organising of women within unions.

Not all the participants were TU Reps – some were union members who had never taken part in any form of Trade Union Education before. They soon grasped the concept of group working and problem solving – proving, once again, that women are great at working in teams and supporting each other.



As the tutor, I encouraged the women who attended to request release to attend the five-day Women in Trade Unions Course which will be held in Nottingham on five Mondays, starting 1 June 2015. This course builds on the IWD theme and gives women time to explore many other issues such as:

- sexual violence and rape
- austerity and its impact on women
- stereotyping and gender biased language
- women in politics
- women – workers or carers?

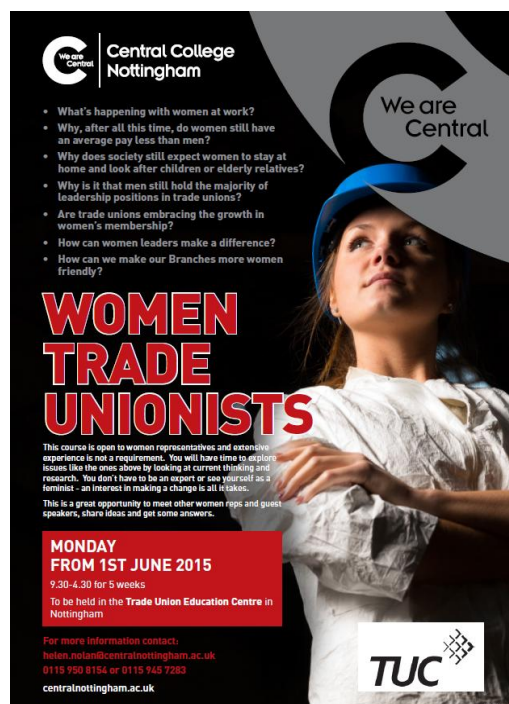
If you are interested in getting involved, please do get in touch

helen.nolan@centalnottingham.ac.uk

0115 9457283

0115 9508154

Helen Nolan
Nottingham TUEd



Central College Nottingham

We are Central

- What's happening with women at work?
- Why, after all this time, do women still have an average pay less than men?
- Why does society still expect women to stay at home and look after children or elderly relatives?
- Why is it that men still hold the majority of leadership positions in trade unions?
- Are trade unions embracing the growth in women's membership?
- How can women leaders make a difference?
- How can we make our Branches more women friendly?

WOMEN TRADE UNIONISTS

This course is open to women representatives and extensive experience is not a requirement. You will have time to explore issues like the ones above by looking at current thinking and research. You don't have to be an expert or see yourself as a feminist - an interest in making a change is all it takes.

This is a great opportunity to meet other women reps and guest speakers, share ideas and get some answers.

MONDAY
FROM 1ST JUNE 2015
9.30-4.30 for 5 weeks

To be held in the Trade Union Education Centre in Nottingham

For more information contact:
helen.nolan@centalnottingham.ac.uk
0115 950 8154 or 0115 945 7283
centralnottingham.ac.uk

TUC

unionlearn “stress busting sessions”

unionlearn delivered their latest “Stress Busting” workshop for URTU at their ULR Conference in Coventry.

Stress in the workplace is an increasingly important topic for all unions and their workplace reps. Government statistics suggest 1 in 4 people suffer from stress and mental illness, losing 10.4 million working hours per year, a figure that is probably under reported due mental health stigma.

The workshop explored reasons why people become stressed, potential trigger points, and the physical, emotional and behavioural characteristics that are associated with stress and mental illness.

In isolation, symptoms do not necessarily indicate stress. However, a sustained and combined set of symptoms may indicate professional medical guidance is needed to maintain a healthy work/life balance.

Work or working patterns, family and money featured as some of the biggest stress triggers for workshop participants. Potential coping strategies to address and reduce stress levels was then discussed with participants.

As individuals we cope with stress in different ways and our work colleagues are often able to identify stress related symptoms and can help us with our own lives.

The workshop equipped participants

with some resources to enable them to take simple self-supporting steps to improve their health and mental health.

While the workshop builds awareness of stress and wellbeing, it aims to guide people to live healthier lifestyles and to take advantage of their unions and the medical professions to reduce mental illness and find the support needed.

To find out more please contact mbrightman@tuc.org.uk

Mick Brightman
Senior Union Support Officer

Anne Casey

It is with regret that unionlearn wishes to inform you of the death of Anne Casey.

Anne was well known across the region and was instrumental in developing the Union Learning Fund for the Ceramic Union CATU in the late 90s. Thanks to her perseverance the union became one of the first in the country to develop strong links with local colleges to improve provision for working people. Anne went on to reinvigorate Shrewsbury Trade Union Studies Centre, and along with Mike and Jean made sure Shropshire had provision to be proud of.

Anne then went on to work with employer engagement with the Workers Education Association, achieving much success before securing a post back in her beloved Ireland with the Irish Trade Union movement. There she worked to set up workers’ learning centres across the country.

Anne was a forthright, passionate defender of workers' rights and was at the forefront of the McDonald's dispute in the late 80s in Ireland around union recognition.

She will be fondly remembered in the region for her impact upon workers' rights.

2015 Chainmakers Festival

Plans are progressing for the 2015 Chainmakers Festival.

It has been confirmed that this year's festival will feature a street festival being held on Cradley Heath High Street on 12th July.

Market stalls will adorn the High Street, and music and street theatre will also feature, both on a stage in the High Street and along the street.



Keeping in touch

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