

Midlands TUC Update

March 2016

Articles

- #HeartUnions 8-14 February
- Women at Work Week
 1. Bank of England
 2. Women's Potential Workshop
 3. Mary Macarthur lecture: Polly Toynbee
- Hope Not Hate: Birmingham Unity
- Mids TUC Annual Conference

 **UNIONS**
8-14 FEBRUARY 2016

From the 8 to 14 of February the TUC ran a special week of activities throughout England and Wales to showcase the amazing work unions do.

The week focused on the value of trade unions in a modern economy, and why the trade union bill is counterproductive.

On Tuesday 9 February branches from across the Midlands took part in the Big Workplace Meeting, a 15 minute live broadcast with Frances O'Grady in conversation with comedian Eddie Izzard on 9 February.

A recording of the Congress House meeting can be viewed at

<http://heartunions.org/bigworkplacemeeting/>

Unionlearn '*love learning love unions*' workshops were held in Leicester, Birmingham and Stoke.

Numerous public actions were undertaken during the week including, '*love football, love unions*' leafleting at Stoke and Aston Villa.



Train station leafleting was undertaken at Birmingham, Stoke, Nuneaton and Wolverhampton.

Public street stalls were held in Derby, Worcester, Chesterfield, Coventry, North Staffordshire, Birmingham and Lincoln



Midlands TUC Update



The CWU organised a regional Trade Union Bill rally in Nuneaton. The event was chaired by CWU Regional Secretary Kate Hudson who said ‘we must educate, organise and agitate and let people know about this Trade Union Bill.’

Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Tom Watson, insisted the ‘Trade Union Bill is one of the most illiberal, unjust and nasty pieces of legislation seen in my lifetime.’ To respond he said ‘we need to inspire the next generation of unionists’ and that ‘working people achieve great things when they stand together in solidarity.’



Trudi Allen from PCS outlined to the rally the attack on check-off that has been underway in the Civil Service.

Tony Kearns, Senior Deputy General Secretary of the CWU reminded the rally that it was unions that gave us paid holidays, the 8 hour day, paid sick leave and ended child labour.

Suspended NUT representative Simon O’Hara outlined the ongoing dispute at Small Heath School and said that ‘our members have been brilliant’ throughout the dispute.

Midlands TUC Regional Secretary, Lee Barron, told the rally ‘let us have more weeks like #heartunions week, celebrating the role of trade unions.’

The GMB coordinated action throughout the week to secure pictures of MPs and Council leaders with anti-trade union bill posters.



UNITE organised a weekend of #sportsdirectshame activity with public actions in Burton, Coventry, Leicester, Lincoln, Loughborough, Mansfield, Northampton, Nottingham, and Worcester



Midlands TUC Update

The Derbyshire UNISON branch organised a #heartunions valentine ball for members.



The week generated nearly 30,000 tweets nationally. There was a 500 per cent increase in videos viewed on the TUC's Facebook page and the most popular on-line content included the 'What have unions ever done for us?' video which can be viewed here: .

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/union-issues/what-have-trade-unions-done-us>

Lots of MPs voiced their support including shadow business secretary Angela Eagle, and Jeremy Corbyn wore his heartunions badge at Prime Minister's Questions, sparking lots of interest.

Weetabix – 9 February



On Tuesday 9th February, the Midlands TUC joined USDAW members at the Weetabix factory in Kettering to take part in the TUC's Big Workplace Meeting.

The USDAW reps spoke about the tremendous success they have had in reducing health and safety incidents by over 60%.



Midlands TUC Regional Secretary, Lee Barron, said: "It was an absolute pleasure to meet with USDAW members at Weetabix. The determination and clarity of focus they have demonstrated in working tirelessly to reduce health and safety incidents is an inspiration.



It should always be our aim that any worker who goes to work should return home fit and well"



Midlands TUC Update

29 Feb - 6 March

The Midlands TUC organised the second Women at Work week to highlight the issues facing women in the workplace and wider society.

Celebrating Women's Potential: 1 March

A seminar was held on Tuesday 1 March 'celebrating women's potential'. Based around the book written by the late Mary Alys, the workshop focussed on how women could progress in the TU movement and how the movement can better address the barriers facing women in the workplace.

Annmarie Kilcline, Regional Secretary of UNITE East Midlands, told the workshop that 'austerity impacts on women hardest. The growth of zero hours contracts and insecure work is hitting women. Job insecurity is getting worse, austerity is dismantling the social fabric of the UK.'

Lee Barron said 'we hold our Women at Work Week to celebrate and promote the role of women in the TU movement'

Lisa Stones from Unionlearn spoke about Mary Alys' legacy. Lisa informed delegates that Mary had always insisted that 'education was a fundamental right for all people and that she had a particular passion for enhancing life chances for women.'

Barbara McKenna, from UNISON East Midlands then spoke about her journey and said that the 'union changed my life'. She then turned to government policy and said that 'cuts to working benefits hit women whilst cuts to services are making women more isolated.'

Barbara then highlighted the crisis in social care with over half of people working in adult care presently on zero hours contracts. On the positive side, she emphasised the vital role of workplace learning in delivering greater life chances for working people.

Bank of England

Union representatives met with the Regional Officer of the Bank of England on 3 March and outlined how women are being affected by the Government's policy agenda and how the continued fragility of the economy and struggling pay is hurting women disproportionately.

Mary Macarthur Lecture: 4 March



On Friday 4 March Polly Toynbee delivered the second Mary Macarthur lecture at the Coronation Club in Blackheath.

Prior to the lecture a tour of workplaces in the local area was arranged. Firstly a group of union organisers and members met with Polly to discuss local issues and campaigns. This was followed by a **social care round table**, where care workers gave powerful testimonies about the issues facing workers in the care sector. The constant sale of homes in the private sector, erosion of terms and conditions and how care workers go above and beyond to deliver for clients despite the funding and management challenges was hugely moving.



Midlands TUC Update

The tour then went to **SWEDA** where the challenges facing the voluntary sector were made abundantly. The skills, work and enterprise agency, based in West Bromwich, began as a women's organisation but now supports men as well. They work with over a thousand local people and have noticed a significant increase in the demand for services at the same time as funding reducing over recent years.

The next visit was to **Sandwell Young Carers**, a local charity working with children that care for a sibling or parent with a life limiting condition, mental health problem or disability. Young carers and staff highlighted the tremendous work they do and outlined the financial challenge facing them and the wider sector.

Polly then met with PCS members from the HMRC office Walsall. The site has 60, mostly female, workers who are at risk of losing their jobs, due to the Government decision to close the Walsall HMRC office.

The tour finished at the Rowley Sure Start Centre where a group of staff, parents and children met to discuss the vital services that the Sure Start provides.

Sylvia Heal opened the Mary Macarthur lecture by pointing to the statistic that 79,000 women are on zero hour contracts in the Midlands and how 'women need unions and unions need women.'

During the lecture Polly drew attention to the 14% gender pay gap, and whilst the gap had been closing it has now stalled. However, this average masks wider difference across sectors and age ranges. She referred to the fact that women in their 50s face a much higher pay gap due to caring duties.

Just 29% of MPs and 3% of council leaders are women whilst the finance sector has the biggest pay gap.

She suggested that all jobs should be advertised, by law, as potential job shares to help tackle inequality and that total pay transparency

would stir demands for more pay equality. She also alluded to the fact that unionised workforces are fairer and we therefore need to get unions into more workplaces.

On the broader topic of inequality in general she pointed out that the economy would be 20% larger if inequality had not taken off in the 1980s. The richest 1%, earning over £150,000 pay 47% in tax, yet the poorest in society pay 76% in tax.

And whilst 76% of Conservative voters think inequality is too wide, the majority of people underestimate how unequal society has become. Those at the bottom think they are nearer the middle than they are, whilst the top 1% grossly underestimate how well paid and privileged they are and have no idea at all about average pay levels.

And growing inequality makes us a more wary society with those more equal societies demonstrably displaying greater levels of trust between citizens.



Midlands TUC Update

Hope Not Hate



Pegida, the far right organisation led by Tommy Robinson, decided to march in Birmingham on March 6.

The Midlands TUC has been working with Hope Not Hate and affiliate unions to deliver a positive, hopeful response that brings the city together and rejects the division that Pegida hope to foist upon Birmingham.

A Unity statement signed by trade unionists, politicians and faith leaders from across the City was produced. The statement can be viewed here:

<http://action.hopenothate.org.uk/page/s/birmingham>

On March 5th an event was organised at Birmingham's Central Mosque that brought together people from across the City to share stories. The event was hugely successful, the Mosque was packed and numerous conversations were held about what we can do to further strengthen community bonds.

What was clear was that rather than responding to Pegida there is a clear determination to control the narrative and to hold similar events across the city and to engage with as many people as possible.

Community events are planned in areas across Birmingham in the months to come. To get involved or to find out more information please contact John Page at john@hopenothate.org.uk

Annual Conference – 27 February



On 27 February, around 100 trade union delegates attended the 2016 Midlands TUC Annual Conference at the Derby Conference Centre. The meeting heard about progress of the Dying to Work campaign now that Jacci Woodcock, the GMB member driving the campaign, has gone public with her story.

Glenis Willmott MEP said 'the last thing anyone needs when given a terminal diagnosis is to have to fight for their job.' She went on to say that 'we raised the campaign at the EU, have secured cross party support and raised it with the Commission to take this forward.'

Jacci Woodcock said 'I would like to think we can change the law so people don't have the hassle I have had.' Jonathan Ashworth MP said "I am determined to support the Dying to Work campaign and to get these changes into law and I am working on a cross party campaign in the House of Commons.'

Paul Nowak, TUC Deputy General Secretary, told the Conference that the Midlands TUC is 'a regional TUC that focuses on campaigning and speaking up for working people and there is no better example than the Dying to Work campaign.'



Midlands TUC Update

Paul went on to outline three key priorities for the TUC:

Priority 1: Trade Union Bill. Paul insisted that the Bill was never about improving industrial relations, it was always about undermining unions. 'It is a bad bill, unjustified and unfair. If electronic balloting is good enough to select Zac Goldsmith as the Conservative candidate for Mayor, it's good enough for our millions of members.'

Priority 2: European Referendum. The priority will be to ensure that the 'voice of working people is heard loud and clear' in the cacophony of public debate surrounding the European referendum in the months to come. The TUC will be highlighting the danger of Brexit for workers' rights. 'We have to make sure interests of working people and not just big business are heard.'

Priority 3: Membership. Addressing membership levels, Paul said 'our movement has to grow if we are to deliver our aims.' Pointing to the fact that private sector membership has grown for the past four years, Paul insisted there was lots to build upon, 'but we have to step up our organising efforts to increase density and be represented across the whole economy and across all demographics.'

Regarding the EU referendum Glenis Willmott said 'the decision is about our future - jobs, investment and security. Toyota's nearby plant secures 30,000 jobs alone, and the EU is needed to tackle international challenges such as climate change and terrorism.'



Glenis went on to outline that 'Labour is campaigning for 'IN'. But we are running a

separate campaign to the Government. We have a different vision: 'social Europe' and workers' rights.'

Labour Shadow Cabinet Office Minister, Jonathan Ashworth, attacked the government for 'sitting back whilst manufacturing is going backwards and attacking public services.' He criticised the Government's record of 'household debt rising, trade deficit rising, exports falling and the productivity gap widening.'



He warned of more cuts to public services to come in the budget and insisted this was not about balancing books, but instead was a deliberate attack, alluding to the fact that local authorities with the greatest need have had the greatest cuts.

The 'deliberate underinvestment in manufacturing and refusal to adopt an industrial strategy was causing the downturn in manufacturing' and that 'we need an active industrial strategy. The success of the car industry is an example of where we need to go.'

The Trade Union Bill was criticised as a 'greater attack on trade unions than even Tebbit attempted' and warned the Bill 'strangles the rights of ordinary men and women to represent working people.'

In a reference to the Government's refusal to allow electronic balloting for unions, he pointed out that after David Cameron resigns, 'the next Prime Minister will be decided by Tory members voting electronically but they won't allow union members the same right.'

On the EU referendum he said that we 'can't let

Midlands TUC Update

it be reduced to the Eton mess of a squabble between Tory politicians. We need a voice to speak for workers' rights....If we leave the EU, workers would no longer enjoy the certainty that comes from having the EU setting a floor for their minimum rights and conditions. In fact I fear it which would trigger a race to the bottom.'

Junior Doctor Dispute

The Conference then heard from Sam Thackery, a BMA member and junior doctor at the Royal Derby Hospital who outlined the ongoing junior doctor dispute.



Sam told delegates that the dispute is 'about the future of the NHS and it affects everyone who uses the NHS'. He went on to inform the Conference that the Government have imposed the contract, despite seeing progress through negotiation, and that there simply was no need to impose and that the BMA are seeking a judicial review.

#SportsDirectShame

UNITE's Luke Primarolo gave a presentation on the #sportsdirectshame campaign, drawing attention to the draconian '*6 strikes and you're out*' policy. A 'strike' can include excessive talking, spending too long in the toilet and calling in sick. This policy meant that a woman was too scared to miss work and ended up giving birth in the work toilet.

As a result of UNITE's campaigning, Sports Direct International PLC share price has reduced

by over 50% and has seen its valuation reduced from £4.8 billion to £2.2 billion.

The pressure has also resulted in a 15p pay rise so far for all 28,000 workers - £10 Million and a Sports Direct internal Workplace 'review' is currently underway.

Over 20,000 signatures have been secured for the petition. You can add your name here: <https://campaign.goingtowork.org.uk/petitions/decent-work-for-all-sports-direct-workers>

Motions

The Dying to Work motion called on all affiliates to support the campaign and to assist the TUC in getting the law changed to ensure that terminal illness is recognised as a protected characteristic.

Martin Allen (GMB) said 'I take my hat off to Jacci. Cancer knows no boundaries. Let's make a difference.'

Engagement with West Midlands Combined Authority

Debate was heard about ensuring the Combined Authority secured positive outcomes for working people through union engagement, procurement and maximising the influence of trade unions.

Gerard Coyne (UNITE) said 'this is not the model of devolution we would want, but unions need to be at the table and engage. We want unions to be engaged to ensure the voice of working people is heard right through the organisation and that wealth is shared.'

Taxis – Fees for Ranking

Network Rail has been seeking to charge taxi drivers up to £1,000 a year for ranking at Birmingham New Street station whilst East Midlands Trains is charging drivers £640 a year to rank at Leicester Station.

Ken Usher (RMT) said that 'if we hadn't taken a stance taxi drivers would have faced huge charges to use Birmingham New Street station. Our dispute has led to more taxi drivers joining the RMT.'

Midlands TUC Update

People's Post Campaign

Darren Glebocki (CWU) outlined the 'People's Post' campaign to defend postal services and fair employment across the industry and drew attention to the CWU's People's Post campaign in Birmingham on Saturday June 4th.

Criminalisation of Street Artists, Performers and Buskers

Stephen Brown (MU) outlined the campaign to defend street artists, performers and buskers in Birmingham. Their campaign secured 5000 supporters and now the City Council is looking at a more progressive policy.

Commemoration of 1842 Events

Jenny Harvey from North Staffs TUC moved the motion to commemorate the events of 1842 in North Staffordshire on the 175th anniversary in 2017 by organising a major commemoration.

Cuts in Post-16 Education

Ron Mendel (North Staffs TUC) moved the motion outlining how cuts to post-16 education will have a serious impact on FE and sixth form colleges. Ron said that 'nearly one million students have disappeared from FE and that area based reviews will result in fewer colleges, longer travel for students and redundancies.

Anti Trade Union Bill

Liam Conway (Notts and Mansfield) Trades Council said that the Trade Union Bill 'will make it harder to speak up for those we represent.' The Midlands TUC will continue to campaign against the Bill and will be writing to all local authorities in the region.

Spanish Civil War Commemoration

Liam Conway (Notts and Mansfield TUC) also moved the motion for the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War to be commemorated in July 2016.

HMRC Closures

Andrew Lloyd (PCS) outlined the campaign against the proposed HMRC closures that threaten centres in Lincoln, Chesterfield, Telford, Walsall, Derby and Leicester. The closures risk 2000 jobs which will lead to poorer

services, loss of trust in the tax system and an economic detriment to the local communities affected.

The Enterprise Bill

Paul Martin (PCS) stated that 'within the Enterprise Bill, there is a nasty element that will allow the Government to rip up our terms and conditions' and urged delegates to raise awareness of the Bill and to lobby MPs to vote against the Bill.

Integrated Transport and Railways

In moving motions calling for integration of transport, investment and greater democratic control of railways, Ken Usher (RMT) said 'we need a fully integrated public transport system, accessible for all, rural & urban, reliable, safe and affordable.'

'The loss of 270 Bombardier jobs here in Derby is a kick in the teeth. The RMT is fighting for jobs.

'West coast trains increased turnover last year by £69million, with a profit of £52million and £6million in dividends. We can afford public ownership.'

Specific Learning Difficulties

Martin Eversfield (Rugby and District TUC) raised how unions could identify and assist members and representatives with Specific Learning Difficulties and/or Neurodiverse conditions, both within and beyond the workplace.

Fighting the Cuts and Re-establishing Solihull Trades Union Council

West Midlands CATUC raised the coordination of activity between local authorities, MPs and trade unions to discuss how to best resist austerity and also called for the re-establishment of Solihull TUC given the imminent creation of the West Midlands Combined Authority.

Midlands TUC Update

Keeping in touch

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