

Norway Summer Patrol June/July 2018

This report will outline some of the experiences and thoughts I had during my trip to Norway in late June/early July of 2018, whilst taking part in the Summer Patrol run by the LO. I was joined on the trip by my fellow GMB young member Joe Wheatley, Gareth Lewis of the TUC, and Callum Clapham from BFAWU.

Before the trip, I had some understanding of what the Summer Patrol entailed, having heard about it from fellow TUC Young Activists after their trip to Norway in 2017. However, I was still very surprised by the level of organisation which had been put into the whole operation. I was particularly impressed by:

1. The numbers of young activists involved. For the entire week there were around 15-20 young Norwegian trade unionists who had given up their time, most of them taking the week off work (some booking the time off as holiday leave), to travel around and check up on young workers in their county. They were able to do this, in part because of
2. Union 'buy-in'. Individual unions paid for their members to take part in the patrol, not the LO. I was happy to discover that many unions actually paid their activists a daily stipend for taking part, which covered their costs whilst they were away. This clearly showed the appreciation unions have for their young activists, as well as an acknowledgement of the value of their work for the union whilst on patrol.

In addition to this, I noticed a couple of different goals and benefits from the activity:

1. The Summer Patrol is an annual conversation about unions, working conditions, and the rights of young people at work. Those with a more national perspective, particularly the paid LO officers, seemed to see this as their main goal, because of the social value, as well as the benefits of
 - a) Being able to answer any questions workers may have about their rights
 - b) Being able to explain clearly, face-to-face, what a trade union is, and why young people should join one

1. The purpose of the interviews conducted by the activists in each workplace was two-fold. The survey questions were useful in their own right as a data collection exercise and are crucial for LO's statistical work and press releases which go out daily throughout the patrol. They also, perhaps more importantly, act as an access point for the conversation between LO activists and workers. It is important to have a credible excuse for the activists entering the workplace, and the credibility of an interview seemed to offer this. It is hard to see a situation where many employers would happily let activists in to unionise their workforce, but the Summer Patrol frequently gained access to workplaces (where they had no legal right to be, just as we have no right in the UK) purely because of their request to interview young workers.

1. Recruitment is also clearly a big part of the Summer Patrol and seemed to be a particular aim for the activists taking part. After conducting the interview, there was a point where the activist would ask if the young worker was interested in joining a union. This was often the part of the conversation where the activists became most animated and engaging. Each of them had their own different ways to recruit,

and more often than not the worker was convinced at least to take and read the information we had provided, and frequently to sign up there and then.

1. Recruitment was made easy by a very simple sign-up sheet, which allowed anyone in any workplace to join their relevant LO affiliated union. Rather than carrying around different membership forms for each union, LO have a simple form which collects the name and workplace data etc. of the worker. Once collected, the activist completes the sign up back at the reporting and debriefing session at the end of the day, and the new member receives their direct debit request in the post.

In terms of being able to bring our experiences back into the region, I have a number of ideas about how we could go about using the Norwegian model, as well as making some improvements and adapting it to fit our region.

1. Though we were lucky to be able to see the patrol in action in a variety of different workplaces in the region, we were only able to patrol during the day due to the travel schedule. The Norwegians did initially patrol in both the day time and evenings, but the organisation and strain on the activists unfortunately proved too much to continue on a large scale. However, I would like to see our region try to operate the patrol during some evenings, as well as on a variety of weeknights and weekends. Young workers are often given shifts later in the day, and we need to make sure we are able to speak to as wide a range of people as possible. It is possible too that because many of our activists in the region are still at sixth form and university, evenings may be more suitable for them too.
2. The unions in our region would have to commit to providing expenses for travel and food for activists taking part. Thankfully, because of the size of our region we won't require unions to pay for accommodation etc., but activists do need to be confident that they will not be out of pocket for engaging in union work.
3. It is currently difficult to see how we could mirror the simplicity of the Norwegian sign up system in the UK because of the overlap between different unions and workplaces, but it is possible that the TUC Union Finder tool could be at least part of the solution. I would also be interested to see if the region would be able to use peer-to-peer texting to follow up with new members to ensure more of them completed their membership sign-ups. Our Norwegian comrades acknowledged there was more to be done with follow ups, and p2p communication could be part of the answer to this problem.
4. I was very impressed with how the Norwegian activists were able to convince workers to become organised, in a range of different workplace situations. This is a credit to the LO training they receive beforehand, as well as the proactive recruitment drives which many unions in Norway organise individually. To ensure activists in our region also have the same ability to convince others to join, I would like to see a training programme put in place for those interested in recruiting, perhaps something along the lines of the McStrike 'AHA' technique. It would also be beneficial for us to try and replicate the relaxed and friendly atmosphere of LO's Summer Patrol, where activists were able to learn and develop their recruiting skills as time went on.

Overall, the trip was incredibly interesting and inspiring. Throughout we discussed the differences between the Norwegian system and our own, and the ways we could replicate and adapt it to our region. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity

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to meet so many lovely, dedicated Norwegian comrades, and look forward to trying to make some positive change in Yorkshire using what they have taught us.