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Vicar and single mum Eve Rose is a UNISON activist in the NHS

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Why the city’s refuse workers had to fight over 30 per cent pay cuts

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Politics has become a branch of Costcutters, says Paul Routledge

UNISON
ACTIVE!
THE MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS IN YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE

RACHAEL AIMS HIGH
Rolling and patrolling - South Yorkshire’s star PCSO p12
Getting our message out on the streets

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For further information and bookings contact:-

Sharon Mehta
s.mehta@unison.co.uk
0113 2182345
A CLEAR PURPOSE

UNISON was born at a time of deep crisis for our public services. The Tories were entrenched and our schools and hospitals were crumbling. It was UNISON who helped turn round public opinion, and it was UNISON members who kept those services going and who helped reshape and rebuild them. We should all be proud of that.

Many of us who went through that time, will feel a sense of déjà vu as the cuts agenda is bandied about once again. The banks and finance houses that plunged our economy into freefall are suddenly off the hook. And, in a triple whammy, Cameron’s Tories plan to cut public spending, cut benefits and freeze the pay of millions. The public services and the poor will end up paying for the reckless adventures of the banks.

But this line of attack has given us a clear purpose as a union over the coming months. Through our Million Voices campaign, we can show there is a better, a fairer way. Cuts are neither desirable, nor inevitable. Investing in public services is the key to economic recovery. Cuts will harm that. Fair taxation and making the banks pay back what they owe us is the moral way.

We will challenge the dishonesty of politicians who claim that “frontline” services can be protected by cutting so-called “back-room jobs”. Without “support” staff, the front-line would collapse.

I am counting on UNISON members up and down Yorkshire to add their voice to our campaign. We can make a difference by saying yes to public services and economic prosperity and no to a race to the bottom on pay and pensions.

The shape of things to come

The attacks on our union in Yorkshire and Humberside are intensifying with employers targeting our activists whenever they see an opportunity.

The disgraceful treatment of Doncaster local government branch secretary Jim Board is a striking example of this growing “union-bashing” attitude.

Jim was suspended for an alleged breach of a management instruction. Our members in the region immediately took up his case and demonstrated against the decision. The suspension has now been lifted but the episode demonstrates the extremes employers will go to in order to damage our organisation.

While national and local politicians seek to shift the blame for the economic crisis onto low-paid public sector workers, UNISON members will continue to be singled out for unfair treatment.

In Leeds we have seen massive public support for the striking refuse workers who were threatened with losing a third of their annual salaries.

The city council intended to slash the wage bill then sell off the service to a greedy private sector employer, condemning workers to non-unionised poverty wages with no pension provision for retirement.

These two regional disputes show the way things are likely to develop in the near future.

But they also show that by standing together, by organising, by recruiting more members, we can and will protect our members from these attacks.

The public know that what we stand for is social justice - and that it is in all our interests to stand up and be counted when our livelihoods and our communities are threatened in this way.
Leeds strike victory inspires all workers

It has been hailed as one of the most important industrial disputes in decades.

For almost twelve weeks, refuse workers in Leeds were forced to take strike action after threats to cut their pay by up to a third – from an average of £18,000 to around just £13,000.

The Liberal Democrat City Council leaders attacked our members' livelihoods with the intention of privatising the service.

They wanted to cut wages and smash the trade unions. But in an unprecedented display of unity between UNISON and the GMB, members held the line and agreed to return to work only after their wages were secured.

This was possible only because the fundamental principles of union solidarity were upheld by the members, their regional staff and donations from UNISON Branches across the country.

Throughout the dispute the strikers had the overwhelming support of the public in Leeds because they could see the gross injustice of the council’s actions and the fairness of the unions’ case.

Regional organiser Tony Pearson said: “Everywhere in the country other workers have seen how solidarity, courage and determination can defeat the most vicious attacks on working people.

“Our members have gone back to work with their dignity and their incomes intact. They have been magnificent and this has been a victory which will inspire workers across the whole country.

“It has been a privilege to be involved with these people throughout this lengthy but ultimately successful struggle.”

The battle was for all of us - page 18

We must seal the deal

A senior UNISON official is calling on all regions to sign as many equal pay deals as possible before the general election.

Bronwyn McKenna, director of organising and membership, warned that a Tory victory would limit any further advances on equal pay.

It was “vital”, she said, “that we go all-out in a concerted push to get local equal pay agreements signed and sealed before that date”, and added:

“The clock is ticking towards a general election and the signs are that equal pay will be an early victim of Tory cuts, if they are elected.

“They don’t see equal pay as a priority, they don’t see the need for the Equality Bill and they will backtrack on allowing local authorities extra funds.”

Bronwyn, who oversees the union’s equal pay work, also cautioned against relying on the employment tribunal route for quick results. Nationally, the union was taking 45,000 equal pay claims through tribunals, but these were “costly and time-consuming”.

Lawyers’ pay bonanza

Leeds City Council has admitted spending £1.5million on fighting legal battles against equal pay.

All this public money has been spent despite the introduction of the national Single Status agreement in 1997 which sought to achieve equal pay in local authorities.

Alan Hughes, regional head of negotiations, said it was “disgraceful” that so much money was spent on keeping women’s wages down. “What a waste of money. Some councils are stuffing money into lawyers’ pockets to put off the inevitable,” he said.

Other high-spending councils in the region are Rotherham which admits to paying out £473,689.96 and York which says its bill runs to £279,802.27.

Grand Prize
Huddersfield University shop steward Tracy Joyce (second left) won the quarterly Britannia Building Society £1,000 prize draw. Also in the picture are (left to right) Lisa Godfrey and Sally Byrom of Britannia and Elizabeth Boulton, branch secretary.
Bill still battling back to health

UNISON member and grandad Bill O’Brien almost died after contracting Legionnaires disease. Bill, a school caretaker from Walkley, was left fighting for his life in hospital when he was struck down with the illness in June.

Bill’s family believe he may have contracted the potentially fatal illness after mopping up flood water at a Sheffield school.

Rod Padley, secretary of UNISON’s local government branch in the city, demanded an investigation into the incident.

The council inquiry was underway as Active! went to press and Bill was still struggling with the after-effects of the killer disease.

Although the city council has not admitted liability, the union has instructed solicitors to take legal action for compensation.

Rod said: “Bill’s lucky he’s still here, he came that close to death. He is a very fit person and that’s probably why he has survived.”

Mayor declares war on trade unions

The suspension of Doncaster branch secretary Jim Board was part of a textbook anti-union campaign written by Tories in London.

English Democrat Mayor of Doncaster, Peter Davies, has a hit list of ways to axe council services – including wholesale privatisation, huge staff cuts, the closure of all youth services and the dismissal of night care staff in residential homes.

Mr Davies claims to be a “new” type of politician, but his policies are lifted from an old Hammersmith and Fulham Council report.

Jim - now reinstated - was singled out for disciplinary action in a direct attack on UNISON.

The Mayor’s interim director of children and young people’s services Nick Jarman says in a memo about Jim’s suspension: “If we are going to bring about modernisation and lasting reform in this organisation we will have to stand up to people who don’t see it like that or, worse still, think they can obstruct things.”

Regional organiser Robin Symonds said the union was taking legal advice and intended to lodge a victimisation claim.

Regional secretary Cliff Williams said: “We must build a campaign against the mayor’s arbitrary 3 per cent budget cuts and his insistence on ignoring the trade unions facilities protocol.

“He is blatantly trying to attack UNISON and destroy freedom of speech.”

A remarkable man

Alan Ward, 61, is sadly one of a growing number of workers who have died because they were given no protection from lethal asbestos.

Alan developed mesothelioma from exposure to asbestos when he worked as a plumber in Yorkshire hospitals between 1964 and 1972.

UNISON, supported by Thompsons solicitors, brought a case against the Yorkshire and Humber health authority when Alan was diagnosed. The union secured him £175,000 in compensation.

Alan, who lived in Weston-super-Mare, worked in a number of hospitals in the Wakefield area.

Alan told UNISON before he died: “No-one told me about the dangers of asbestos dust. When I was 23, we just smashed off the asbestos and carried on working."

Eamonn McDonough of Thompsons, said of Alan: “He was a remarkable man. Just using the word ‘was’ is hard to accept. He was charming and articulate and when we first met he was a tall, good-looking and fit one.

“He struck me for the vast majority of the time I worked for him as the most positive asbestos sufferer I have ever come across.”

So who you gonna call?

Bullying is rife in workplaces throughout the region, according to shocking new statistics. More than 29 per cent of workers are currently suffering in silence and 69 per cent of those have been bullied before, the figures reveal. Of those who are not currently being bullied, 52 per cent had witnessed it and 45 per cent had been victims in the past.

UNISON and Company Magazine are launching a Bully Busters campaign to tackle the lack of legislation.

BNP menace

The successful Hope Not Hate campaign in St Helen’s ward in Barnsley to stop the BNP from winning the recent by-election was a major achievement. Now the organisation is asking people to donate £15 – or whatever they can afford – to step up the campaign in Yorkshire. Contact http://action.hopenothate.org.uk/thewestofyorkshire

Open to abuse

Government policy to roll out personal budgets for social care could leave individuals open to abuse, UNISON has warned councils.
Police Community Support Officers need extra powers immediately, Carole Maleham told the Labour Party conference in Brighton.

Ministers want to put the decision off until after the election, but Carole, assistant regional convenor, said the role of PCSOs needed to be standardised throughout the country and they should be given the ability to detain suspects as soon as possible.

The Government needed to be bold and do away with a system in which they had different powers and wore different uniforms in different places, said Carole.

Their role wasn’t always understood by the public and in a recent survey 74 per cent of PCSOs said they didn’t have the powers to do the job.

In another debate Wendy Nichols, regional convenor, told delegates that mandatory pay audits were one of the key ways to ensure an end to the gender wage gap. Unions should be free to take “representative” legal action to win equal pay on behalf of groups of women rather than be forced to take cases for each individual.

There should be tough laws that deliver prompt redress for people suffering discrimination.

Wendy said UNISON backed the Equality Bill because it gave a real chance to use public procurement to ensure fair wages.

By popular demand...

UNISON ‘POSITIVELY PUBLIC’
DONCASTER RACEDAY
SATURDAY AFTERNOON
31 JULY 2010

It’s a life-changing experience - participants in a recent Return to Learn course aimed at getting members back into education and training are pictured here at the union’s regional headquarters with Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and MP for Normanton and regional secretary Cliff Williams.
It’s a nuclear greenwash

I was appalled at the article in the summer issue of Active! in which Hilary Benn, argued for safe nuclear power, like it’s some Green initiative! Writing on his website, his father, the great Tony Benn, disagreed. He wrote: “I was told, believed and argued publicly that civil nuclear power was cheap, safe and peaceful and it was only later that I learned that this was all untrue.”

EDF Energy, the so-called “sustainability” partner of the London 2012 Olympic Games, is the company behind Green Britain Day. EDF Energy took control of UK Nuclear, buying shares from our government. Andrew Brown (Gordon’s brother) just happens to be UK head of media relations for EDF. UNISON does not believe that new nuclear build is the right solution to our need for secure, low carbon energy.

James Appleby, Environmental Officer, Leeds Met University branch

Editor replies: We plan to publish a piece on UNISON’s policies on the environment in a future edition. Thanks for your contribution to the debate.

Turkeys’ Xmas vote

The number of UNISON members who vote Tory never fails to surprise me. And the latest survey says only about 30 per cent of public sector workers will vote Labour. The union should target members who will be caught by the Tories’ proposed pay freeze for those earning more than £18,000. They should know what awaits them if Cameron wins the election.

Jamie Handley, regional branch

What a dust-up!

Congratulations to the refuse workers of Leeds who fought against £6,000 pay cuts. Do the Tories and Lib Dems in charge of the city council really think that legislators introduced equal pay legislation to reduce men’s wages, not to increase women’s? Of course they don’t. These councillors are not daft, they’re just cynical.

Leon Kirkham, Leeds LG branch

It’s hard graft

Great to hear the region has enjoyed a boost in recruitment (summer issue of Active! “Hitting the target”). Clearly this is due to the increasingly efficient way in which the union goes about its business. But it’s also a testament to the hard work put in by activists.

Heather Varley and Eve Jenkins, Wakefield LG branch

The coverage was a load of old flipping rot

Whilst it is incumbent on you to attack Tory MPs, your coverage of the MP expenses scandal was ludicrous. Let’s not forget it was a Labour MP, Margaret Moran, who thought it acceptable to “flip” her second home and claim £22,500 for dry rot in a house a full 100 miles away from both her constituency and from Westminster. Her defence was the limpest performance I have ever seen. The whole set-up is a travesty, particularly to those of us who are being asked to exercise pay restraint.

Steve Mason, North Yorkshire and York PCT, Harrogate

SEND YOUR LETTERS AND STORY IDEAS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor, UNISON ACTIVE, Commerce House, Wade Lane, Leeds LS2 8NJ. OR EMAIL: active.magazine@unison.co.uk

We reserve the right to shorten letters to fit the available space. Views expressed on this page are not necessarily those of the editor or the union.

The writer of the star letter will win £50 in vouchers. Please remember to include your contact details. We will withhold names and addresses if asked.
It was the bins, or lack of them, that did it. From the minute Leeds council decided to cut the refuse workers’ pay, trouble was guaranteed. The regional press whooped in delight as the brave refuse workers walked out.

Editors collectively dusted down every cliché in the book and used them, shamelessly. Scabs were brought in to strike-break, the Wharfedale and Airedale Observer told us that positions were “entrenched” and that “rubbish piles up as bin strike heads into fourth week”. Cue loads of pictures of rubbish piling up.

The Yorkshire Post kept assuring us that the “bin strike continues” and then did its bit to assist the inevitable war of words that broke out. “Union fury at ‘slur’ on striking bin workers”, it said, naming the villain of the piece – council leader Richard Brett.

The council continued to “slur” union members, by accusing them of supergluing the locks of rubbish dumps (BBC North) and dumping sacks of rubbish on Brett’s doorstep (all). But it was “not the union, but angry Leeds residents” who were the culprits, retorted the YP.

Charges of dirty tricks kept dirty jobs story going

The BBC got stuck in with Radio Leeds leading on it in most bulletins. A presenter told listeners that he “didn’t remember a local story that has engaged you so much as the bin strike in Leeds”.

And, of course, with every dirty jobs strike, there has to be charges of dirty tricks to keep the row going. The “row intensified” (Nidderdale Herald), the strike “gets ugly” (Daily Mail) as Brett claimed he had received threatening phone calls. The Ilkley Gazette had the inside story: “The caller spoke with a less than convincing Liverpudlian accent and called Brett a liar, using a menacing tone”.

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Helpfully, the Harrogate Advertiser ran hints to cope with the strike, such as “if your bin is full, put rubbish in another container”.

The People scented a “Winter of Discontent”, warning of “massive strikes not seen since the 70s”. The evidence was flimsy, but that never got in the way of a good scare story.

Not to be left out, the Hull Daily Mail had their refuse workers on the brink of a strike, the Sheffield Star threatened a walkout and ITV Yorkshire hinted that Pinderfields and Pontefract staff could be balloted.

But the Wakefield Express wistfully reported “strike action narrowly avoided” at Pinderfields Hospital.

Over in Doncaster the battle was over Board. No sooner had the new English Democrat mayor been elected, than Radio Sheffield was reporting that UNISON branch secretary Jim Board had been suspended for speaking to the press.

Jim had always spoken out on behalf of social workers and he soon became a cause celebre.

The Yorkshire Post warned the mayor that he faced a “mass walkout”. And BBC North broadcast “supporters out in force to support the one who chose to speak out”.

After a short, but determined struggle, the Doncaster Star was delighted to report the news that Jim had been reinstated.

For some light relief, once again the calm of the Calderdale retired members who, according to the Halifax Courier, raised £250 for charity from a recent garden party. ■
Health and safety is a key issue for UNISON. Working conditions play a very important role in the health, safety, and wellbeing of UNISON members. It is not something that can be left to employers despite their clear legal duties.

To ensure your health and safety, UNISON provides you with advice, guidance, and national representation. However, it is you that makes it happen on the ground, day in and day out.

UNISON safety reps:
- Consult with members and other workers on issues of concern; make representations to management;
- Conduct safety inspections;
- Investigate complaints, incidents, ill-health, and near-misses; consult with safety inspectors.

UNISON’s Safety in Numbers pack will help you plan your campaign. Use it to encourage more members to become safety reps and non-members to join UNISON.

Every branch should have received a pack in July. Further copies of the poster and leaflet will be available as a UNISON stock item.

**NO SHOW, NO DOUGH**

Increasing numbers of public sector employees in the region are being forced to work when they are sick.

Pam Sian, assistant regional convenor with responsibility for health and safety, says that more and more employers are monitoring absence and offering bonuses to those who go into work what ever their state of health.

“Some employers in the region are paying up to £225 for people with a 100 per cent attendance record,” she says.

“That is a substantial amount for many of our low-paid members – especially as it comes as a lump sum.

“The money tends to be paid just before Christmas which adds to the incentive for people to attend work with coughs and sneezes - and worse,” says Pam.

“You don’t have to be a doctor to realise that people with infectious illnesses should not go into work and spread bugs among colleagues.

“Attendance bonuses are pretty irresponsible when you think of diseases like swine flu which people are particularly susceptible to during the winter months.”

Pam urges members and activists to let her know about such practices by calling her on 07944119560 or email p.sian@unison.co.uk.

Pam is the region’s representative on the union’s national health and safety committee and will be convening another regional forum on the issue next year.

“I want people to know that I’m here to help and that they should contact me if they are concerned about any health and safety issue.”

**Sian Thomas** on how employers may be helping to spread disease by withholding attendance bonuses from anyone who has been off sick

**Left: Pam Sian**

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**SWINE FLU CAN BE SPREAD BY PEOPLE TURNING UP TO WORK WHEN THEY ARE SICK**

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**Sian Thomas** on how employers may be helping to spread disease by withholding attendance bonuses from anyone who has been off sick

**Left: Pam Sian**
The union is determined to give activists a first class training to enable them to operate even more effectively. In this article Dave Mitchell, regional manager finance and resources, outlines the courses targeted at shop stewards and branch secretaries.

**UNISON shop stewards are the face of the union.** And as such, they must be “treasured, respected and supported”, in the words of NEC member Sue Highton at this year’s TUC conference.

Stewards are the frontline troops, who provide new starters and non-members with an impression of what UNISON can do for them.

**SOUNDS DAUNTING**

It is therefore critically important they are well-trained and informed. Stewards need to have a wide range of skills and attributes; from the ability to negotiate with managers to the ability to communicate effectively with members.

It sounds daunting, but with the right backing activists often discover skills they thought they never had.

The Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA) seeks to ensure that activists are properly prepared for the job. It provides a framework for the accreditation of union representatives. Under the legislation only accredited union reps are entitled to represent members.

Not only is it important that activists are properly trained, it is vital that we make sure that as many of them as possible improve their skills.

The overall aim of the activist training “key performance indicator” (KPI) is to ensure that as high a proportion of UNISON’s stewards as possible are appropriately trained.

The region has a target of 50 per cent of all stewards accredited under the ERA by the end of 2009. By July 2009 we had achieved 43 per cent. We therefore need to improve our performance to meet the objective.

Accreditation under the ERA is achieved by attending either the basic steward training course or a “One Step Ahead” organising course. A refresher course is necessary every three years.

Performance is measured by comparing the total number of activists recorded on the RMS - the membership database - against our training records.

The region currently believes that its performance is probably better than that showed through analysis of internal figures. There are a number of reasons for treating the figures with circumspection – principally because not all training is recorded and also because some members on the RMS are probably no longer active.

The region is currently working to ensure that our statistical returns accurately reflect activity on the ground and we will therefore be taking steps to ensure that all training is accurately recorded and that the stewards’ records for each branch are cleansed.

These two issues will be raised with branches during discussions on the preparation of joint branch assessments early in 2010.

UNISON accepts that some activists are able to devote more time to the union than others. There are those who wish to provide a full
representation service to members, while others simply wish to receive UNISON materials to pass to their union colleagues.

Increasingly the union offers direct electronic communication to its members, so there should be less need for what traditionally have been referred to as “mail-box stewards”.

EQUALITY ISSUES

In future they may not be recorded on the RMS, but consideration will be given to how they could still be retained on mailing lists.

When reviewing KPIs, consideration will also be given to refining this particular measure, to take account of the wider training provision on offer to our representatives through initiatives such as the “stewards passport” which provides a modular approach.

It covers such issues as grievance and disciplinary processes, negotiating skills, collective bargaining, equality issues and confidence skills.

If you turn to page 14 of this issue you will find an interview with a new activist who has recently undergone UNISON training.

If you are a new or inexperienced steward and you want to develop your skills to provide an improved service, then contact your branch education officer or visit the region’s web-site to discover which courses are available.

The other KPI on training relates to branch secretary training and our current target is 50 per cent.

Traditionally such training has been provided through a branch secretory module on our annual branch officer training weekend.

This course is targeted at new branch secretaries, but also accepts applications from those with experience who wish to undertake a refresher course.

On this basis the region is likely to get close to the target, but it is felt that in line with the approach taken with steward training, there should be a wider based approach for branch secretaries. A new modular training programme is therefore being devised nationally.

The training will be made up of five modules with the intention that the first two will be completed within 18 months of election/appointment. The course includes:

- Branch secretaries training (based on the current course)
- Managing the branch
- Organising, representing and bargaining
- Developing activists
- Strategic campaigning and planning

There will also be a refresher course for long-standing branch secretaries which will provide a gateway into the remainder of the training programme.

Completion of the first two modules will provide initial accreditation and it is intended that completion of all five modules will lead to a formal accreditation possibly through Ruskin College.

It is hoped to run a briefing session for all branch secretaries before the end of the year, which will provide further details on the approach to be adopted.
RACHAEL AIMS HIGH

Mary Maguire interviews former lifeguard Rachael Graham, a real livewire PCSO, who has won a top award for her outstanding community work

Break-dancing with 40 kids or making sure the elderly are not bothered by cold callers is all in a day’s work for Sheffield police community support officer, Rachael Graham. She loves her job and it shows.

Rachael is one of a growing number of PCSOs who are changing the face of policing up and down the country. They pound the streets, deter offenders, gather intelligence and support and improve frontline police work by being the eyes and ears of neighbourhoods. And, at last, they are getting the recognition they deserve for a job well done.

Earlier this year, Rachael was awarded South Yorkshire PCSO of the year for her “outstanding contribution to neighbourhood policing” and for her ground-breaking work with youngsters and the elderly in the Gleadless Valley area of Sheffield.

Rachael was one of 11 UNISON members who were finalists in the UK-wide PCSO of the year, run by Jane’s police review magazine and sponsored by the union.

STREET-DANCE
A former lifeguard and swimming instructor, Rachael, 26, studied photography at university. She joined South Yorkshire police in 2007.

Rachael got stuck in straight away, when she found a pupil who was always in trouble with the police, and decided to do something about it. She founded a street-dance project, aimed at getting young people off the streets and involved in activities that would steer them away from anti-social behaviour.

At first, it attracted 6 or 7 people, but now has more than 40 members. The project has been a fantastic success and the group, Aiming High, was invited to perform in front of the Lord Mayor at Sheffield Town Hall.

REAL DIFFERENCE
Talking to Rachael, you get blown away by her energy and enthusiasm. When she first started her job, she hand-delivered more than 1,000 leaflets to residents in her patch. She says: “I just wanted to get involved in the community, especially with children and the elderly. I wanted to make a difference to youngsters, with nothing to do, who were in danger of getting onto the crime ladder, through anti-social behaviour.

“I work with children in schools, in residential homes and youth clubs. The Aiming High street dance project is just coming into its second year and numbers have grown from 6 to over 40. This was a huge multi-agency project involving South Yorkshire police, parents, the youth offending service, Sheffield council, Sheffield homes, fire service and the community forum.

“The youngsters are brilliant. I join in the dancing to help break down barriers and improve relationships between young people and the police.

“It’s been great, I feel like I am making a real difference to people’s lives.”

Rachael also goes into schools under the Miss Dorothy programme to teach children to make the right choices over road safety, bullying, peer pressure, knife crime and internet safety. And she has been instrumental in setting up a “No Cold Calling Zone” in areas with a high number of elderly and vulnerable residents.

UNISON is working hard to enhance the image of PCSOs, but with people around like Rachael, it makes the job so much easier.
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THE INTERVIEW
EVE ROSE

WOULD YOU ADAM AND EVE IT?

Barrie Clement interviews Eve Rose, divorcée, single mum, hospital chaplain and now one of the growing army of dedicated and highly trained UNISON activists

The Vicar of Dibley she ain’t. Eve Rose is very much at the sharp end of Christianity. Having spent nearly four years as a curate on the massive Seacroft council estate in Leeds, Eve is not one for polite platitudinising over the earl grey.

Eve is a socialist, UNISON activist, divorcée and single mum.

In fact she wasn’t sure whether the Church of England would ordain her. “I’m not exactly the kind of person they normally have. In fact somebody high in the church said I didn’t have a hope in hell, but God in his wisdom said Yes.”

After years as a political and trade union activist – much of it with the T&G - Eve joined UNISON late last year and got involved early in the New Year.

HORRIBLY ANGRY

Eve, 46, now combines her work as senior chaplain at the Humber Mental Health Teaching Trust with her new role as a UNISON rep.

She has already got her basic union accreditation and has nearly completed the rep’s course.

Eve started life in Raynham, Kent, moving to Strood in the Medway Towns at the age of ten.

It was at that tender age that she became a Christian. It was something of a surprise to her family who were not religious. Even more of a shock was her decision at the age of 14 to join the Labour Party Young Socialists.

“It didn’t go down very well with my stepfather. He was a card-carrying Conservative. He was horribly angry,” she says. Her biological father however was a socialist and her sister, a psychiatric nurse, has been a Labour Party parliamentary candidate.

During the school holidays Eve worked on a broccoli farm where she became involved in the T&G and helped organise a crèche. “I was very active. In fact management thought I was too active and didn’t keep me on.”

She went to a secondary modern school. “I was profoundly dyslexic and I failed my 11-plus. The school I went to was known locally as The Pram-pushers because many of the girls were pregnant by the time they were 15.”
“I got my GCSEs and I stayed on to do A levels. I was the first person from my school to go to university.”

On her first day at Leeds University she stood for chair of the local branch of Labour students. “It was a bit arrogant of me to stand as soon as I got to university and I didn’t get it, but the person who won asked me to be vice chair and I became active in the organisation.” She also became a student rep on the Labour NEC.

DEFINING MOMENT
Eve kept up her membership of the T&G while she was at university and was involved in the Leeds trades council. She read history, politics, religious studies and archaeology at university. Actually she would concede that the word “read” might be misleading. She didn’t read many of the set books at all. “I didn’t do much academic work. My economic history tutor said I would pass his exam over his dead body. When I was sitting the exam a fellow student was sick over my papers. I thought I’m not meant to pass.” But pass she did - by the skin of her teeth - and she was awarded a third class honours degree.

The main reason for Eve’s indifferent academic performance was her devotion to political and trade union activism. In 1983 Eve was one of a group of Leeds trades council representatives who attended demonstrations in Warrington outside the print works owned by Eddie Shah.

Shah was in the process of launching Today, a national newspaper which was to be printed by non-union labour. “That was a defining moment for me,” says Eve, who was 18 at the time. “The police had been talking to us outside the printing plant and it all seemed reasonably civilised. The next minute there was a hush and the police withdrew.

“Then other police on horseback with no numbers on their uniforms charged at us. I was kicked between the legs, one of my friends was hit in the face smashing his glasses. “If the authorities were prepared to take that kind of action, it confirmed to me how important trade unions are. If unions weren’t that important, they wouldn’t go to such brutal lengths to suppress them.”

During the miners’ strike in 1984-85 Eve was at Orgreave coking plant for one of the biggest clashes of the dispute. “The Government thought that if they could bring down the strongest union they could wreck trade unionism.”

WORST TIMES
After university she got married and worked for St Annes shelter for the homeless in Leeds. She also worked for the council among young women who had been forced into prostitution. It was then she endured one of the worst times of her life. Her husband was killed in a car accident and she suffered a miscarriage.

Some time later she married again and had two children, but the marriage ended in divorce. So Eve has had the kind of experiences which give her an insight into the kind of stress that the patients at the Humber Mental Health Teaching Trust can be under.

“I realised that I didn’t want to be a parish priest. I can remember one church meeting when they spent hours talking about what colour ladies toilets should be.

“I had to get permission from the Bishop of Hull to be a rep. I live in the bishop’s house and his wife is a UNISON member. He’s been very supportive.” Eve is convinced there is a definite synergy between Christianity and trade unionism. “I believe socialism and trade unionism are key in the Gospel message.”

Background
- Born 1963, Rainham, Kent
- Left secondary modern school in Strood, Kent, to go to Leeds University
- Divorced, single mother with two children

Activism
- Involved in the Transport & General Workers’ Union since school days
- Member Labour Party Young Socialists
- Student rep Labour NEC
- In 1982 joined Leeds trades council
- Joined UNISON 2008

Career
- Youth worker after university
- 2001 curate, Seacroft Estate Leeds
- In 2004 became senior chaplain Humber Mental Health Teaching Trust
Area organiser and marathon runner Karen Towne brought a community health branch back from the dead. Barrie Clement finds out how she did it.

Most UNISON branches are well-run and efficient – a testament to the hard work put in by activists. A small minority of branches however, sometimes hit rock bottom. That’s what happened to Hull and Holderness Community Health Branch. It simply wasn’t doing its job. Members’ grievances were not properly addressed and vital meetings with management went unattended at a time when dramatic changes were being forced through.

There were also allegations of financial irregularities, which the union is still investigating.

OPEN MEETINGS
The branch - which covers the Hull and East Riding PCTs, Humber Mental Health Teaching Trust and voluntary organisations - needed to be pulled up by its bootstraps. That is where Karen Towner came in.

Karen, an area organiser, was sent in as interim branch secretary at the beginning of the year.

“The idea was to come in and build it up, to make an impact and develop it,” she says.

“I was expecting a negative response from members, but they realised that certain individuals were responsible for the poor service. They didn’t see it as UNISON’s fault.

“I was surprised how patient they were and they had been let down. They had been paying for a service and for representation and they weren’t getting it. It was appalling and sad.”

Her priority when she arrived at the branch was to hold a series of open meetings. “I was determined to go out to sites and say hello. It was simply a question of talking to as many people as I could. I always took application forms along to sign people up. And I was always on the lookout for possible union reps.”

Karen has also started a branch newsletter and has applied to the region for £1,700 so that new members can be provided with a “welcome” pack.

When Karen arrived there were only five reps and two of those hadn’t been trained. Now with the help of local organiser Margaret Atkin, there are 22 with each individual responsible for a single function. “We didn’t want to over-burden people,” says Karen.

Perhaps the issue of most concern recently has been Hull PCT’s plan to transfer 1500 employees to a private contractor. No-one from UNISON was turning up to critical meetings with management. The union didn’t have a voice and members were in the dark about the implications of the decision.

A questionnaire sent to UNISON members at the trust found that 91 per cent were unaware that TUPE did not offer full protection. And 95 per cent didn’t realise that the new employer could cite “economic, technical or organisational” reasons for scrapping protected terms and conditions.

PRESS COVERAGE
By July however trust directors were only too aware of the branch and its activists. UNISON representatives sat through a key meeting of the board, but refused to budge when it wanted to switch to private session. Eventually the directors were forced to go back to the trust’s headquarters to finish the meeting. The new leadership at the branch ensured that it got a lot of press coverage.
The union had been the victim of a PR campaign by the trust which had been “economical with the truth”, says Karen. Under the previous branch leadership, no-one spoke to the press, so journalists never heard UNISON’s side of the story.

“Now we produce press releases saying we are here, we are back,” says Karen.

**BIG CHANGES**

One of the other issues occupying Karen’s time and that of her new colleagues are the implications of the new foundation status awarded to Humber Mental Health Teaching Trust. Management is seeking to streamline the organisation and the union is keeping a close eye on developments.

At East Yorkshire PCT directors are planning big changes for its community services, but unlike Hull they have promised that where possible services will be delivered by the NHS.

Part of the strategy for rebuilding the branch involved getting activists to work together. In October members went to the old Kellingley Colliery for a team-building exercise organised by Ray Gray, regional officer.

It was not for the faint-hearted. There were various “challenging” activities including one in which participants had to make their way through smoke-filled rooms. “It was an opportunity for people to spend some time together and build relationships,” said Ray.

Members have also got a Christmas social to look forward to and a pantomime starring branch activists. Last year the only pantomime witnessed by members was the way in which the branch was run.

“The branch was a mess,” says Karen. “I was anxious about the job I had to do, but also excited. It was something to get my teeth into.”

Last year the branch was lucky to get three or four people to meetings, but now it regularly attracts a dozen or more. And when Karen arrived it had 1392 members, now membership stands at 1500. That’s an increase of nearly eight per cent – compared with a national target of three per cent.

Now that the branch is back on its feet, she is increasingly allowing the elected reps to take the initiative. But she will be there to support them for some time yet. She will remain secretary until the AGM in March before she is called upon to do a similar job elsewhere.

Ray sums it up: “When Karen arrived it was a dead branch. Now it’s really vibrant.”

And as if her job as a branch troubleshooter wasn’t challenging enough, Karen has also been undergoing something of a personal battle. Four years ago she was attacked on the way home from work.

**NEW CONFIDENCE**

Her self-confidence has gradually been rebuilt through road-running. She has completed the London marathon and as Active! was going to press she was preparing for another 26-miler in Dublin in aid of International Rescue.

Thankfully Karen uses her stamina to turn branches round as well.
The strike by Leeds refuse workers was more than just a little local dispute with over-mighty council bosses. It marked a critical new phase in the struggle to maintain wages and conditions in public service employment right across northern England.

Political shifts in local government over the last year or so have unleashed a domino threat. It’s Leeds today, Sheffield, Barnsley and other councils and public employers tomorrow.

That’s why it was important to stand and fight for the bold refuse workers and their families, who refused to cave in to the Tory/Lib Dem demands for pay cuts of up to 30 per cent.

From the beginning, council chiefs and their spin doctors tried to confuse the issue, claiming that the 1970 Equal Pay Act was to blame for wholesale changes in pay, staffing and shift patterns.

In fact, most councils – 60 per cent plus - across the country have negotiated new pay arrangements for men and women under a nationally-agreed Single Status agreement dating back to 1996. Another third are in the process of doing so.

And the government has made available a total of £1.65 billion to councils to help fund this radical reshaping of employment policy. Other big cities managed to do deals. Why not Leeds?

The answer, I believe, lay in the politics of the situation. David Cameron and Nick Clegg both believe in public spending cuts NOW – not after the general election. They reject the government’s strategy of spending our way towards economic recovery.

And their minions in Leeds city hall took their cue from their political masters. Equality legislation was merely a smokescreen. The whole purpose of the Equal Pay Act was to level women workers up to the pay of male workers – not level men’s wages down to those paid to females.

Barbara Castle, as Employment Secretary under Harold Wilson, brought in the legislation. She must be turning in her grave at this perverse use of a law she intended to help, not harm, working people.

But the Tory/Lib Dem coalition in charge of city hall obviously believed that public opinion had been softened up enough to accept spending cuts. They were wrong. Public backing was strong. Letters to the local press and phone-in polls signalled a high level of public support for the strikers.
A resident of Guiseley wrote to the Yorkshire Post, accusing council bosses on six-figure salaries of “grotesque ineptitude” and suggesting they should set an example by volunteering a pay cut.

Fat chance. Richard Brett, Lib Dem council leader, received £45,883 from the public purse last year. Chief executive Paul Rogerson’s salary rose by more than £5,000 to £191,467, while Neil Evans, director of environment, got £132,593 – £15,000 more. His rise in one year was bigger than the wages refuse workers were supposed to live on.

Despite their fat-cat salaries, council bosses did not make out a convincing case that it would have cost £45 million to sustain the wages paid to 600 cleansing workers at existing levels. They kept repeating this magic figure, without spelling out the details. I suspect their case didn’t stand up to scrutiny, that’s why.

Instead of negotiating a way out of the impasse, management blustered for weeks, refusing to talk to union representatives until the men went back to work. They trashed the strike and brought in private contractors at enormous expense to do a fraction of the job.

Pressure from local MPs and Environment Secretary Hilary Benn, MP for Leeds Central, got them to think again. Even so, it was only when it became clear that the lads’ resolve was unshakeable, and the dispute was beginning to take on the character of a long, drawn-out struggle, that they agreed to negotiate seriously.

Meanwhile, a senior officer in the cleaning department in Leeds, Andrew Mason, confirmed that council chiefs planned to privatise the refuse service in 2011 – just when pay protection for the workforce would expire.

So all the hoo-hah about the Equal Pay Act was just that. The real, secret intention was to slash wages, staffing levels and conditions ahead of privatisation, so whoever picked up the lucrative contract could make bigger profits.

I’ve been around disputes a long time, but I’ve rarely seen one so cynically entered into by a rag-bag alliance of politicians who nobody had ever heard of until the refuse workers walked off the job.

Richard Brett, the former science teacher now ruling the roost in city hall, plainly fancies himself as a bit of a political toughie. That was before his plan to cut the refuse workers’ pay ran into a roadblock of workforce anger and union organisation. He looks rather less of a hard man now.

At one stage I heard two items of confidential information circulating inside city hall. The Lib Dems and their Tory pals were looking for 20 per cent cuts in council staffing next year, and a special project team chaired by Brett was examining what services, right across the board, could be privatised.

The refuse workers were fighting for their livelihoods, but their struggle had the widest possible implications for fellow workers. That’s why UNISON was right to pick up the gauntlet.
HERE IS A DISTURBING TALE.

The story involves political leaders causing massive controversy with their lavish expenses. It continues with a weak and chaotic political leadership which seems out of touch and self-serving. Meanwhile, the behaviour of the political elite creates a backlash among voters. The saga reaches a climax when an election delivers a right-wing leader who seems poised to throw everything into new disarray.


In Doncaster politicians have been annoying voters for years. And just when you thought it couldn’t get any worse following the scandals of the Donnygate council corruption in the mid-90s and continuing dissatisfaction with the borough’s leadership, it did. In the summer, the town elected an English Democrat as mayor.

The election certainly got Doncaster on the map, again. Doncaster’s newspaper the Free Press was bombarded with so many hits on its website the day after the election that it crashed. And the interest was international, not just from Doncaster people and political anoraks. The election was a big gain for The English Democrats, a comparatively new party, and another shock in a traditional Labour stronghold.

The English Democrats want to get the UK out of Europe, they want an English parliament. They also want the reunification of Yorkshire in a move back to traditional counties. They, like Mr Davies, talk of common sense in government. But much of their “common sense” simply equates to right-wing values and xenophobia.

He has been dubbed the Boris Johnson of the north. If only it was just that bad…

Mr Davies’ narrow election victory over an independent candidate was on a ticket of cutting council funding for Gay Pride and for gay, lesbian and black initiatives in the town; stopping translation services and instead encouraging people to learn English.

FREE PRESS

He promised to axe council jobs that he considers to be merely politically correct roles; stop the council’s newspaper which he regarded as peddling politics at the taxpayers’ expense; cut the number of councillors from 63 to 21; de-twin the town from international counterparts, saying that the liaisons only led to expensive jollies; and withdraw Doncaster from membership of organisations such as the Local Government Association, which he believes are only talking shops.

He has also taken a pay cut, choosing to be paid £30,000 a year rather than the £73,000 which was available for the post.

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Matthew Flinders, a professor of politics at Sheffield University, thinks Mr Davies did not expect to
become mayor. “I don’t think there was anyone more surprised than him at the result. At first it looked as though he would not be able to get a cabinet together, but now he has.

“He campaigned strongly on the grounds that politicians didn’t deliver on their promises. Now he is finding it difficult. Only Doncaster could produce this.”

TALENTED STAFF
He believes it will be a source of instability when Doncaster needs stability. “It needs to move on from the past. There could be an outflow of talented staff from the council because they will move to another more stable local authority.”

So what encouraged the voters to put Mr Davies, a political novice and one who has clearly not researched his election pledges, into office? Professor Flinders thinks that a mixture of national and local issues were at play with local concerns providing the greatest thrust.

“The national factors provided the broad backcloth. People were fed up with the main parties throughout the country in the wake of the MPs’ expenses controversy. But also in Doncaster there was a great deal of dissatisfaction with the incumbent.”

It is more than a little ironic that the electorate were unhappy with the last mayor, Martin Winter.

He was projected as a “new beginning” for the town following the 90s scandal of Donnygate which had triggered the biggest police investigation in the town’s history.

It is also widely thought that Doncaster voted so decisively in favour of an elected mayor (35,453 to 19,398) in 2001 because of its troubled past.

But Labour’s Mr Winter, who was elected the following year, went on to create his own controversy, with a number of expensive staff appointments and a move to plush offices in Doncaster’s Mansion House, which came to be known as the Winter Palace.

But despite the growing unease there wasn’t a Bolshevik revolution only a modest march and a large petition in 2004 and Mr Winter managed re-election in 2005.

He was then automatically excluded by Labour for forming a breakaway party. This year he decided not to seek re-election following criticism of his handling of the council’s response to the deaths of seven children who were known to the social services.

MONKEY SUIT
Professor Flinders also believes that Mr Davies’s election owes much to New Labour’s attempts to overhaul local government. “This is one of those unintended consequences, but it is an example of democracy.”

At least this unintended consequence wasn’t a man dressed in a monkey suit as happened in Hartlepool seven years ago.

But Hartlepool has shown that unintended consequences may stick around. Stuart Drummond won his third term this year.
Six Months of Hell

After years of campaigning by UNISON and a leading Labour Euro-MP, European laws will soon take effect to protect workers from the dangers of used needles. Peter Lazenby reports on the frightening impact of a growing problem.

Jim works at a Yorkshire hospital. He and his family have just gone through six months of anguish. Jim reached into a laundry basket at work and immediately felt a stinging pain in his hand. He withdrew his hand and to his horror saw a used needle – a sharp – hanging from the ball of his thumb.

The accident was the start of a nightmare of uncertainty for Jim, his wife and their two teenage children. He immediately reported the injury to his line manager, who logged it. He also told his union rep. Then began the tests.

Jim, who doesn’t wish to be fully identified, knew that anyone injured by a discarded “sharp” could contract any one of a range of blood-borne diseases, some of them life threatening.

There’s Hepatitis B and C, which attack the liver. There’s HIV. In fact more than 20 dangerous blood-borne diseases can be passed on by contaminated needles.

Jim was tested for them all. Eventually he was given the all-clear. The news brought relief and ended the uncertainty, but did not cool the anger Jim felt over what he, his wife and family had gone through.

As an active union member he knew the accident was avoidable. If health services adopted the right procedures, such accidents need not happen.

Agonising Wait

Jim is just one of thousands of health workers in Britain who have been injured by discarded needles. The accidents are not confined to hospitals either, though hospital staff form the biggest group of workers at risk.

Street cleaners and refuse clearance workers have also faced the agony of uncertainty after being “stung” by a discarded needle.

Nor are the injuries confined to Britain. Across Europe more than one million “needlestick” injuries are suffered in the countries of the European Union every year. The one thing that most of them have in common is that they are avoidable.

Now European legislation is imminent which should drastically reduce the likelihood of such accidents.

UNISON is one of a group of unions in the UK and across Europe who have taken up the demand for legislation to force health authorities to introduce new safeguards against the risk of needlestick injuries.

The lobbying began in 2004. In Britain UNISON and other unions sought action from the Government, only to be told that responsibility for introducing effective safeguards lay with health service trusts who had the power to implement them.

So, as the problem was a European-wide one, the battle was taken to Europe.

Stephen Hughes is a union-backed Labour Euro-MP for the North East. For 25 years he has championed the issue of health and safety at work, winning for himself a reputation not only in Britain, but across Europe.

Mr Hughes is backed by our sister union the GMB.

He said: “Needlestick injuries are suffered by nurses, doctors, hospital porters, cleaners, laundry staff, refuse collectors and other support workers.

“ Injury from hollow-bore needles is the primary route by which healthcare workers and others acquire blood-borne diseases.”

Discarded needles can cause a wide range of diseases.
borne and potentially fatal diseases occupationally. Surprisingly small amounts of blood can result in potentially life-threatening infection.

“Even for those that thankfully do not acquire an infection, a needlestick injury can result in many months of anguish and uncertainty as the victim waits to find out if they are one of the unlucky ones.”

**RISK REDUCTION**

On World Aids Day in December 2004 Mr Hughes met healthcare workers from across Europe. As a result he investigated the issue, and became convinced that new, Europe-wide legislation was needed.

There followed dozens of hospital visits, meetings, consultations with experts.

In 2006 a report he produced was accepted by an overwhelming majority in the European Parliament. There were a series of complications, but now thanks to his efforts, and to pressure launched initially by UNISON and other unions, legislation is to be implemented. It will be binding on all the countries of the European Union.

The legislation will be based on research findings of how best to reduce the risk from needlestick injury.

“There is a huge body of evidence that proves that four particular measures will prevent the majority of needlestick injuries,” said Mr Hughes.

He said the measures are:

■ Training and regular re-training of healthcare staff
■ Ensuring safer working practices such as safe disposal of used needles
■ Eliminating the use of needles where safe and effective alternatives are available
■ Requiring the use of safety-engineered medical devices that incorporate needle protection, such as shielding and retracting needles.

Although the European legislation is on its way, the battle is not over. Once it is in place it must be acted upon by the employers, and it will be up to workplace union representatives to make sure they do so.

Stephen Hughes MEP, who deserves the gratitude of our union and our members for his unstinting efforts, said: “Our colleagues in the USA have benefited from needlestick prevention measures mentioned above since 2000.

“Now it is our collective challenge to make sure that the significant progress made in Europe actually leads to real and effective injury prevention.”

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“I HAVE been touched by my many conversations with healthcare workers who have suffered needlestick injuries, and genuinely shocked by the impact it has had on their lives. “We are now close to ensuring that this unbelievable situation is brought to an end” – Stephen Hughes, Labour Euro-MP for the North East, international campaigner for workers’ health and safety.

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NEVER AGAIN, SAYS KEN

With a general election only months away, UNISON’s “A Million Voices” campaign will set out what we expect from a future Labour Government. Peter Lazenby reports.

Experience is a good teacher.
It is Ken Curran’s experience of the 1980s that confirms his absolute belief that never again should Britain’s working people have to suffer a Conservative Government: a Government which wreaked havoc with local democracy; which systematically destroyed millions of workers’ jobs; wrecked communities; privatised publicly-owned energy, water and other industries; and condemned a generation of young people to go from school straight onto the dole.

Ken is chair of UNISON’s political committee in Yorkshire and Humberside. He oversees the union’s project in the region linking local workplace branches with Labour Party branches and constituencies. UNISON Labour Link encourages an input from UNISON members into Labour’s policy-making structures.

The link stretches from local level to national level, to Labour’s National Executive Committee, on which UNISON has members, and into Parliament itself. In the Commons 78 Labour MPs are either UNISON members or have other direct links to the union. Seventy-eight is a substantial number, sufficient to sway a debate, or win or lose a vote.

UNISON members and activists want to see a Labour Government returned which is going to act in the interests of working people.

But first, said Ken, look back to a time when the alternative happens, to the 80s and early 90s. To the Thatcher and Major governments, for a reminder of what happens when the Conservatives rule.

“I was born in North Shields and my parents came to Sheffield in 1969 when I was seven,” he said. “I left school then studied public administration at Sheffield Polytechnic as it was then. Then I was unemployed.”

That was in the 80s and Ken Curran was among hundreds of thousands of young people, and millions of workers, cast onto the scrapheap.

Eventually he did get a job, working in Sheffield Council’s housing department. There he saw other people’s poverty.

““I was working in housing benefits,” he said. “It used to be heartbreaking. When you saw people coming in for interview, desperate for us to sort out their claims, threatened with eviction from their homes, people living in utter poverty.”

“The worst thing that affected young people was when the Government took benefits away from the under 18s. We used to see the same people, year in, year out.

“In a lot of communities, people had no chance of getting work at all, year after year. People were stuck in their blocks of flats. They couldn’t get out. Their horizons were shrunk.

“I don’t want to go back to that. The flats are knocked down, long gone. But there are still areas of hard-core poverty.”

Ken Curran has children of his own. Like many thousands of UNISON members with families, he doesn’t want to...
see them go through the same
desperate situation again.

In the last 12 years, since
Labour was elected in 1997,
there have been many changes
for the better, but there is still a
long way to go, more change
is needed, and the UNISON
Labour Link and the “million
voices” campaign are about
making sure a future Labour
Government works for those
changes.

“We have had some
progress – the minimum wage,
Sure Start, Tax Credits,” said
Ken. “And look around you, at
our city and town centres.

“Look at Leeds and
Sheffield. Virtually every city
centre is a different place, far
more vibrant, new buildings.
There are some areas where
we haven’t done so well, but
look around you.”

Nevertheless, the events of
the last two years have shown
the flaws.

“The bonus-driven culture
has to change,” said Ken. “It
has got to be tackled through
international action. We need
strong, co-ordinated
international action through
Europe , and we need to work
together as international
organisations to change that
culture.”

Which is one of the reasons
why the UNISON Labour
Link and the “Million Voices”
campaign targets Britain’s
Labour Euro-MPs as well as
those at Westminster .

The campaign was taken to
the Labour Party conference,
but will continue as the
election approaches.

Fears are growing that after
the general election public
services and public spending
will be an inevitable target for
cuts to pay for the bail-out of
the banking system after the
economic crisis it created.

In the 1980s the
Conservatives axed local
government funding and
public services. In 2010 the
jobs of UNISON members
will almost certainly be on the
front-line of any attack on
public services.

The “Million Voices”
campaign is demanding a
concerted defence of public
services.

Ken Said: “At the heart of
the campaign is the demand
that the Government puts
people first, and takes the vital
actions needed to build a
fairer society that will help us
beat the economic crisis.

“We, in UNISON,
passionately believe that hard
working people must not be
left to pay the price for a crisis
they did not create, and will
be taking that message into
the party.”

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**Tory Targets**

Public services are facing their
greatest threat for decades.
The Government borrowed
hundreds of billions of pounds
to support the economy and
prevent an unprecedented
meltdown following the
collapse of financial institutions
such as Northern Rock.

The strategy worked. Recovery
is under way. But now the
money has to be found to repay
the debts. Public services are
the obvious target. We know
the Tories will not hesitate to
introduce draconian cuts.
That is why we need the
“Million Voices” campaign both
to re-elect a Labour
Government, and to ensure that
Labour will protect our public
services.

Every voice counts - including
yours. Mobilising one million
UNISON members is no easy
task, but that is what must be
done. We need YOU to add your
voice to the campaign. Visit
UNISON’s website, or speak to
your workplace union
representative to find how you
can help.
The Government has now conceded that the NHS is the “preferred provider” for community health services in the England.

Before the rethink, the government’s “Transforming Community Services” policy could have resulted in the wholesale privatisation of some services.

Current NHS staff could also have been transferred to employers outside the NHS and risked losing their employment rights – including their pensions.

John Cafferty, UNISON’s regional head of health, says the government is now committed to the NHS as the provider of choice for community health services.

CLEAR DIRECTION

In a recent speech to the Kings Fund, health secretary Andy Burnham also announced that failing services would be given the opportunity to improve before alternative provision was considered.

John says branches must still get involved at the earliest stages of the debate to make sure their voices are heard. And he insisted that the only acceptable solution to transforming community services is one which protects our members and the services they provide.

He said: “We are delighted with the Government’s decision and that they are backing it up with clear direction to NHS Trusts. The only acceptable solution is an NHS solution - and this outcome is now far more likely.”

In his Kings Fund speech, Mr Burnham said: “Where a
provider is not delivering quality – and the new accountability information will more readily demonstrate that – we will set out a clearer process that will provide an opportunity for existing providers to improve before opening up to new potential providers. “This is fair to all as it means everyone knows where they stand and services stand or fall on the quality they provide.”

Following the announcement, the Department of Health and the National Social Partnership Forum, including UNISON, drew up a number of principles on which this approach would be based. These were set out in a joint statement sent to all NHS trusts with the department declaring that all PCTs would be expected to follow the principles.

The statement says:

- NHS and existing providers should be engaged at an early stage of service development.
- NHS providers should have the opportunity to bid for any opportunities that are developed.
- Early and substantial engagement of existing providers is expected.
- Early and substantial engagement of staff and their trade union representatives, where applicable, is expected.
- Decisions are taken locally, but within clear national guidelines.
- Commissioners must demonstrate:
  - Fairness and transparency of process
  - Clear rationale for decision making
  - Needs-driven
  - Proportionality (that the commissioner acts proportionately to the size and seriousness of any problem)

- Commissioners are expected to secure best value and quality for patients and taxpayers.
- Commissioners are expected to actively monitor the quality of services and to initiate a process with providers if services are not adequate.
- The starting point for some scenarios will be the contractual mechanism that currently exists.
- Robust oversight and assurance of all the above through:
  - PCT Boards
  - SHA Assurance
  - World Class Commissioning, Transforming Community Services
  - Partnership oversight through Regional Social Partnership forums

The joint statement released by the Department of Health went on to say: “To illustrate these principles and how they might be developed in practice we have developed six scenarios which set out the processes the Department expect PCTs to follow.

“These scenarios will inform the development of further guidance from the Department of Health. The Department will engage with the SPF and other stakeholders in the drafting of a successor document to Necessity – Not Nicety; a revised PCT Procurement Guide; and revised Principles and Rules of Co-operation and Competition.”

PUBLICLY FUNDED
However John said members and branches still need to be vigilant and engage in the process to ensure PCTs carry out these requirements in an open and honest way.

He said: “We have seen the reaction from the Tories, and their private healthcare provider friends. But our health care should remain publicly funded and provided by NHS staff.

“Despite the battles we have fought against privatisation and Labour’s acceptance that NHS services are best provided by NHS staff, the Tories have made it clear they fundamentally disagree with the ethos of publicly funded and provided health care for all – regardless of income.”

If you need any more information about this issue here are some relevant web sites:

- www.unison.org.uk/healthcare/pct
- www.unison.org.uk/healthcare/pct/tcs

Or check out the Department of Health website:

- www.dh.gov.uk

NHS Employers:

- www.nhsemployers.org.uk

Alternatively contact your branch for a copy of the briefing materials UNISON has produced, or ring UNISON Direct on 0845 355 0845.
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WINTER 2009

UNISON ACTIVE!

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THE ENVIRONMENT

FEATURE

TOM’S GRAND PLAN

Sian Thomas interviews Yorkshire Forward chief executive and UNISON member Tom Riordan who has an imaginative but achievable vision of a Greener region

_Where there’s muck there’s brass – and where there’s muck there’s carbon emissions._

Yorkshire and Humberside has always punched above its weight when it comes to heavy industry.

Unfortunately that has also meant that it has produced more than its fair share of pollution.

And the region is still pumping out huge amounts of carbon. It contributes 13 per cent of the UK’s greenhouse gas emissions — yet provides 7.5 per cent of the country’s wealth.

Carbon dioxide emissions in Yorkshire and Humberside showed a rise of 1.5 per cent each year between 2000 and 2004, compared to a nationwide fall.

This is because of our dependence on coal-fired power stations, compared to the national switch from coal to gas.

Tom Riordan, chief executive of Yorkshire Forward and member of UNISON, aims to change all that.

As head of the region’s development agency, Tom is championing a massive project to store the waste carbon dioxide in the rapidly-depleting gas reservoirs under the southern North Sea.

At each major source of emissions in the region — largely power stations – the CO2 would be converted into a liquid. Then it would be pumped along pipes directly into the undersea reservoirs.

This highly imaginative “carbon capture and storage” initiative would dramatically reduce the region’s emissions. It would also enable power stations to continue to use coal until greener technologies were available.

Tom points out that if global emissions aren’t cut, by 2080 the sea level around the Humber Estuary is predicted to rise by up to 82cm - nearly three feet.

He says that if levels of CO2 in the atmosphere continue to rise – and the economy expands by between 2 per cent and 3.5 per cent a year – we could expect to see an increase in annual flood damage of more than £10bn by 2080 along the Lancashire-Humber corridor.

“There is no better place to do carbon capture and storage than Yorkshire and Humberside. Nowhere in Europe has such a large number of power stations so close to redundant gas fields in the North Sea.

“We also have commercial investment in place, proven technology and engineering skills.

“We have the capability of storing up to 10 per cent of the UK’s carbon emissions, creating thousands of jobs and creating an infrastructure that would attract carbon intensive manufacturers. It’s a no-brainer.”

Tom calculates that such a carbon capture system would cost £2bn at 2008 prices, but also predicts that over 25 years it would enhance the regional economy to the tune of £30bn creating an extra 55,000 jobs.

“We can either choose to chug along, making minor changes here and there, or we could lead the way.

“This is a really big idea. It’s the equivalent of high speed rail for carbon. We need to show how transformational it could be.

“UNISON is much more far-sighted than many policymakers in Whitehall on this issue. The union can help to articulate the case for carbon capture and help promote it.”
A ruling by the highest court in the UK has thrown the law on employers’ obligations to protect workers’ health and safety into confusion. **Nigel Saunders** of Thompsons Solicitors, considers the consequences.

Tensof thousands of UNISON members who perform vital tasks away from their “routine” workplaces may no longer have full health and safety protection.

A controversial ruling by the Law Lords means that employees seriously injured while using faulty equipment in such circumstances will not always have the right to compensation.

Among the staff affected will be those in the care services who assist ill, elderly and disabled people - and often go into service users’ homes on a daily basis.

**Above:** Staff in care services are affected

Such workers rightly expect their employers to take responsibility for any injury they suffer in such places as a result of using defective equipment.

But now, in a UNISON-backed claim for personal injury, the House of Lords has decided that an employee working away from their normal workplace does not always have full protection.

The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) impose certain obligations on employers to protect workers. Work equipment includes anything from heavy machinery to lifting devices to mobile phones and computers.

The regulations are meant to apply to all situations and workplaces where health and safety legislation also applies – that is pretty much anywhere that people may be working. But many union health and safety reps will know that when and where PUWER actually applies has been a key battleground in the past.

Now it seems that obligations on employers only apply when they have some degree of control over the work equipment, even though the regulations themselves do not actually say that.
For instance Mrs Smith, a UNISON member who worked for Northamptonshire County Council as a carer and driver regularly took disabled people from their homes to a day centre.

On one occasion she attended the home of one wheelchair user, as she had done many times before. There was a wooden ramp leading up to the door. This had been installed years previously by the National Health Service, not by her employer, the local authority.

**VISUAL CHECKS**
The council had however inspected the ramp as part of its general duties to risk-assess Mrs Smith’s work and had trained its employees to make brief visual checks on the ramp on every visit.

But as Mrs Smith pushed the wheelchair down the ramp, the edge of it crumbled, she fell and was injured.

Thompsons was instructed by UNISON to sue Mrs Smith’s employer for a breach of the PUWER regulations.

Everyone in the case agreed that the problem with the ramp could not have been found through just looking at it according to the council’s instructions to staff. In any case, previous court rulings in other cases confirmed that employers are strictly liable for defective work equipment whether or not the defect was obvious.

Nevertheless the local authority refused to take responsibility for Mrs Smith’s accident. It argued that the obligations imposed by PUWER did not apply when it had not provided the work equipment.

In the end - and after many hearings in other courts - the Law Lords agreed with them.

Up until the Lords’ ruling it was understood that the PUWER obligations are imposed on employers in respect of work equipment that is “provided for use or used by an employee of his at work”. That means any work equipment that an employee uses for work, whether or not it is provided by the employer.

Only non-employers have lesser obligations under PUWER. To be responsible for the safety of the person using the work equipment they have to have control over the equipment and how it is used by the person using it.

But in Mrs Smith’s case the Law Lords decided that employers too must have some measure of control over the work equipment to be responsible for it and their employee’s health and safety.

They said that for PUWER to apply, the work equipment had to be “incorporated into and adopted as part of the employer’s business”. In other words, the employer is not responsible for the equipment if they have not provided it and don’t have direct control over it.

Whether or not the council had direct control over the ramp, it is hard to understand this decision. It effectively re-writes the regulations to make them say something they simply do not.

Mrs Smith’s employer knew she was using the ramp, had inspected it and had the power to instruct her not to use it and to provide her with an alternative.

So, where does this case leave the applicability of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations? While the wide definition of work equipment was not at issue, whether the regulations apply to employers and when, is now very unclear.

Clearly excluded will be equipment totally outside the control of the employer, such as items used by a travelling employee at the premises of clients about which his employer knows nothing at all.

But what remains unclear is the position of equipment of which employers are aware of, do not own, but the use of which they can influence.

In general terms the law requires that equipment provided for use at work is:

- suitable for the intended use
- safe for use, maintained in a safe condition and, in certain circumstances, inspected to ensure this remains the case
- used only by people who have received adequate information, instruction and training; and accompanied by suitable safety measures, eg protective devices, markings and warnings

**The Regulations**

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*(Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998)*
It’s a time for holding our nerve

Councils and other public service employers in the region are picking fights with their staff and their unions because they think they can get away with it in the current climate of hysteria over public debt. Politics has become a branch of Costcutters.

Politicians are engaged in a deadly contest to see who can cut public spending the most. It’s a who-can-we-sack race.

Naturally, the Tories were first off the mark, demanding slash and burn policies immediately, without waiting for an election.

Dodgy Dave Cameron wants a wage freeze, sackings across the whole spectrum of public employment and reduced pensions. His party is bankrolled by the bankers, but he wants public service workers to pay for the bankers’ recession.

Not to be outdone in this macho enterprise, Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg - he of the thirty bedhead notches (I call him Buenos Noches) - called for “savage” cuts.

Panting to keep up, Gordon Brown finally uttered the “c” word at the TUC conference. And before you could say P45, Education Secretary Ed Balls volunteered a £2 billion reduction in his schools budget.

Politics has become a branch of Costcutters.

The election was originally a clear-cut choice between Labour investment in public services versus Conservative cuts. That now seems light years away, though it...
AFTER a gap of more than a century, the annual Trades Union Congress went back to its roots in Liverpool this year. It was a week of unusual sweetness and light. The sun shone, and the Mersey cold wind didn’t blow.

A new model of the general secretary, Brendan Barber, was unveiled. Unlike last year’s, this was five stones lighter. He no longer looks like the very fat man who waters the workers’ beer, more like a reformed night-club bouncer.

And which issue got most media coverage? Spending cuts? Labour’s travails? No. It was the vexed question of whether women should have to wear high heels at work. Well I go to the foot of our stairs – in flat shoes of course.

LEGAL FEES SCAM

MANY UNISON members round ‘ere have retired miners in their family. And many of them have benefited from the Coal Health Compensation Scheme for chest diseases and conditions like Vibration White Finger. But they may not know they can claim back legal fees wrongly charged by solicitors, who’ve already been paid by the government. The average sum reclaimed is more than £900, and around 150,000 people are still owed money, largely because they don’t know about this lawyers’ scam.

If you know someone who might benefit, persuade them to get in touch with the Legal Complaints Service.

NEVER THE RIGHT TIME

BOSSES in Yorkshire gave a decisive thumbs-down to government plans to give fathers six months paternity leave, even though only half of it is paid. And you can’t take it unless the mother is back at work and the child has to be six months old.

The change won’t happen until 2011 (if at all), and Business Minister Pat McFadden says fewer than one in 16 fathers will take up the offer. Less than one per cent of small firms will be affected.

But the chambers of commerce condemned the reform as “a huge burden”, insisting “this is not the time to introduce this legislation.” In more than forty years of reporting such changes, I have never known a time when employers thought it was the right time.

It never is. They always have an excuse. There’s a recession on. Or we’re just out of one, or going into one. Or trade is bad. Or there’s an R in the month, or it might rain.

The bosses’ fake wrath, driven by greed, is enough to make you go home and start a baby. That would really screw them.

Footnote

AFTER a gap of more than a century, the annual Trades Union Congress went back to its roots in Liverpool this year. It was a week of unusual sweetness and light. The sun shone, and the Mersey cold wind didn’t blow.

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And which issue got most media coverage? Spending cuts? Labour’s travails? No. It was the vexed question of whether women should have to wear high heels at work. Well I go to the foot of our stairs – in flat shoes of course.
The new buzz words in many parts of local government is “Dismissal and Re-employment”. The words mean what they say. Local government employers are sacking workers on a wholesale basis and offering jobs back again. So what’s the point?
It’s the latest device to make changes to members’ terms and conditions without agreement with unions.
In such cases employers can’t get UNISON to agree because the proposed terms are not good enough and unfair to members.
Furthermore the employers’ proposals perpetuate pay discrimination the union has fought hard to eradicate.

PRECIOUS LITTLE
Employers are justifying their conduct by arguing that they need to bring in new Single Status arrangements.
Well, many of them have done precious little to bring them in, even though they have been committed to do so for 12 years.
So why are employers doing this now? The reason is simple. They are frightened of equal pay claims which could cost them a lot of money in compensation payments.
They see the device of dismissing and re-employing as a way round the problem.
Like all dismissals, members are protected by unfair dismissal law which applies to all with at least 12 months service.
If the dismissals are found to be unfair then members would be entitled to compensation, even though they continued to work after being re-employed.
Compensation would be based on the amount of any pay cut suffered in the “new” job.
But we have to tread carefully. Employers will seek to justify their actions as being necessary to bring in new equality-proofed pay arrangements under Single Status in the absence of agreement with the unions.
They may be able to persuade tribunals that their actions are justified.

‘PAY EQUALITY’
Whenever our members are faced with such threats UNISON will give legal advice on the best way forward.
The most effective way of meeting the challenge is to act collectively and not to agree to changes individually.
For some members the changes will lead to a pay increase. Employers will often seek to get those members to agree to the changes.
That can only weaken the ability to fight for those facing pay cuts. If employers are able to demonstrate that many have agreed to changes, it makes it much easier for them to defend dismissal and re-employment for those that don’t.
Employers only act in this way when UNISON refuses to agree new terms which would achieve “pay equality” through pay cuts.
Some employers see the way forward as cutting men’s pay to the level of women. But UNISON demands that women’s pay is levelled up to men’s.

ADVICE GIVEN
The union believes that is not an acceptable way to resolve discrimination issues and so the union is refusing to legitimise the employers’ approach by agreeing the new pay structures.
UNISON’S policy is to defend its members by industrial and legal means as the circumstances dictate.
Members who are affected by these actions will always be given advice by UNISON on the circumstances as they apply to them - and in particular to ensure that members’ jobs are not threatened by employers’ actions.

Mark Berry of Thompsons on how councils use dismissal and re-employment
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Meet the UNISON plus team working with Branches

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