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PUBLIC WORKS:
a million voices for public services

April 2012 No. 94

Scotland *in* UNISON

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You can't cut your way to better services

LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS 3 MAY
Key questions to ask candidates



- How will you protect services?
- Will you oppose any proposals for privatisation of key council services?
- Which people do you expect to be hit hardest by the cuts/policies you propose?
- Should everyone delivering public services - council staff and those working for contractors - be paid the Living Wage?
- What is the best way to fund local government?

Challenge candidates to match the UNISON Scotland policies in our Local Government Manifesto 2012:

For Public Services and a Better Scotland ● Democracy ● Fairness ● Excellence ● Partnership ● Investment

For Real Democracy: UNISON's manifesto shows the way



‘Councillors should not be passive administrators of a cuts package determined elsewhere - but champions of their areas’
Mike Kirby p3

VOTE Local elections 3 May

You can't cut your way to better public services, UNISON warned Scotland's councils as it launched its manifesto for May's local elections.

Scottish Convener Lilian Macer outlined the union's alternative – a radical reform of local government around five key democratic principles and direct involvement of users and staff in the design of local public services.

Lilian said: "The cuts are hurting – as we warned they would. But they're not working. You can't cut your way to better services. And you can't privatise or outsource your way to better services.

"Local government has to make a radical, democratic change - by involving users and staff directly in service design.

"What we want is real

improvement - not the failed dogma of privatisation and outsourcing. When they've been subjected to democratic scrutiny, experience shows they've fallen apart – like Edinburgh's costly privatisation project.

"Centrally driven initiatives cannot provide the answers to the complex needs of our diverse communities.

"People need to have a real say in how services are delivered in their communities."

Mike Kirby, UNISON Scottish Secretary, welcome the fact that local government elections are no longer overshadowed by the Scottish Parliament election.

"We campaigned successfully for that and we now hope this election will bring a much-needed focus on the importance of local government and the essential services our members work to provide for their communities.

"Local government has a



‘What we want is real improvement - not the failed dogma of privatisation and outsourcing’, Lilian Macer.

crucial role in reducing inequality to help create the fairer and better Scotland we want to live in.

"We'll be challenging all the candidates in the forthcoming

elections on their commitment to public services - and asking them to support these principles and our manifesto for a better way." See www.unison-scotland.org.uk/publicworks

NHS workers deliver more action on pensions

UNISON Scotland kicked off a new round of action on NHS pensions in March.

Selective strikes started with Ayrshire and Arran and were set to roll out to Greater Glasgow and Lothian.

The action aims to put pressure on the Government for a Scottish solution to all aspects of pensions changes, including the 'Year 1' increases to employee contributions of up to 2.4% - a pensions tax on health workers.

"Our members are very distressed and angry that the Scottish Government, at the behest of the UK government, is



asking them to pay much more in pension contributions", said Tom Waterson, chair of UNISON Scotland's Health Committee.

"The reality is that many of our members will simply not be

able to afford to make the proposed contribution increases due to start in April, and will be forced to opt out of their scheme to the future detriment of themselves, their families and

communities - and the public purse."

Members in the Central Decontamination Unit at Ayrshire Central Hospital Irvine (pictured) were the first to take action on 13 and 14 March. Ewing Hope, UNISON Ayrshire and Arran Branch Secretary, said, "The staff within the CDU were superb in their support to take action in defending the pensions of all our members in the NHS and are grateful for the support shown by other UNISON branches.

"The support of the Regional Secretary, Scottish Head of Health, Chair of the Scottish Health Committee and

colleagues from Renfrewshire LA Branch, NHS Glasgow and Clyde Branch was greatly appreciated".

Mike Kirby, Scottish Secretary, said: "We do not accept that the Scottish Government has no option other than to follow the UK Government's proposals.

"There is a separate scheme in Scotland and there are other options to fund the cost. These should be pursued in partnership.

"We call on the Scottish Government to seek a Scottish solution, delay the pensions tax, and engage with us to find a negotiated settlement."

Personalisation is a mask for cuts

by Brian Smith
Glasgow City Branch

Over 80 people, including 30 service users, attended a conference on 10 March to organise against cuts in services to disabled people in Glasgow.

Organised by UNISON, the Defend Glasgow Services Campaign, the Social Work Action Network and disability groups in the city, the event

heard how Glasgow City Council has rushed ahead with the national policy of Personalisation (also known as Self Directed Support) primarily as a way to save money.

The council claims that 20% of current funding can either be 'redirected' to other support services or used to help meet the Social Work cuts targets - in 2012/13 they intend to use Personalisation to cut £10m from the city's social work budget.

No-one at the conference disagreed with the principles underpinning Personalisation - who is against choice, services tailored to individual needs and empowerment?

However, the way in which Glasgow City Council has chosen to implement Personalisation is leading to cuts in support, less choice, poorer quality services and attacks on support workers' wages and conditions. A market driven

approach to social care will only lead to a 'race to the bottom'.

The conference agreed a campaign statement which includes calling on the council to adopt a no cuts approach, for a more transparent and inclusive individual assessment process, more resources for advocacy services and the protection of workers' wages and conditions.

We now need to step up the fight to defend services for disabled people, and to make the principle of choice a reality rather than a mask for cuts.

Police staff fight massive job cuts

by Malcolm Burns
Acting Communications Officer

UNISON police staff members face a cut of 3,000 jobs as the Scottish Government demands massive budget savings while maintaining police officer numbers.

UNISON has called on Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill to start planning a modern, balanced police team - with the right people doing the right jobs - rather than cutting thousands of vital police staff posts to meet police officer targets and budget savings.

The Justice Secretary faced difficult questions from police staff representatives at the UNISON annual police seminar in Stirling on 21 March.

UNISON Police Committee chair George McIrvine said: "Cutting police staff makes no economic or policing sense. It simply means that important support and expert jobs are increasingly done by police officers."

"We know this because it's already happening. We've lost a thousand police staff jobs in the last year or so.

"And now in the run up to the new single force, thousands more police staff jobs are under threat because of targets for cost savings and for police officer numbers.

"The result could be to take more than a thousand officers off the streets."

A UNISON Scotland survey showed that around 53% of the thousand police staff posts which have already gone are being covered in part or in full by police officers.

That means around 500 police

officers are now not out on the street fighting crime. If the future staffing 'plan' means more of the same, up to 2,000 officers could, at least in part, be taken off operational duties.

Police staffs make up 15% of the police budget while police officers make up 73%. The government has an arbitrary target to maintain police officer numbers at 17,234 - based on the number in place at the time they made their political commitment to a thousand extra police "on the street".

The focus of savings are therefore unfairly concentrated on police staffs.

Police chiefs, constrained by government targets to cut costs and keep the same number of officers, plan to cut 2,054 police staff posts by 2015/16.

They plan a further 350 job losses if police staff don't accept massive cuts in terms and conditions.

As we went to press, UNISON Scotland received confirmation

Photo: Mark Campbell/Rex Features



Cutting thousands of police staff would take policing in Scotland back to the 1970s. It would be like Life on Mars, a cop show set in a timewarp - but in fact, not in TV fiction.

from the Treasury that single tier police services in the form proposed by the Scottish Government will lose the current VAT exemption - which means an additional bill of around £26m - and further 800 police staff posts being lost.

The number of jobs threatened now stands at 3,200 - around half all current police staff.

George McIrvine said: "This would just take us back in time to

the bad old days of policing with cops backfilling jobs they are not trained for nor skilled in.

"We need a modern, balanced police team - with the right people doing the right jobs - for a better, safer Scotland.

"We now face the fight of our lives to win that campaign, protect our police service, and save thousands of vital jobs."

For more info see www.unison-scotland.org.uk/police

College staff fighting for jobs and communities

UNISON members in further education colleges are fighting for their jobs and the communities they serve in the face of huge cuts imposed by the Scottish Government.

More than a thousand jobs have already been lost in colleges over the last year, including compulsory redundancies.

The Scottish budget in January announced a cut of 30% to FE funding over the next three years.

Karen Dawson, chair of

UNISON's FE committee said: "Let's be clear, college cuts mean compulsory redundancies for UNISON members.

"They also mean more young people will not get the support, training and education they need to find a job in these difficult times. This short-term saving is going to impact on Scotland's future for decades to come."

UNISON organises FE workers including support staff, specialists, administrators, cleaners and canteen staff.

All are vital to effective learning and training provision in communities across Scotland, in the face of mounting unemployment, especially amongst young people.

FE branches are campaigning with students, community groups and other unions to prevent cuts and to call for real funding to ensure the future of further education in Scotland.

You can sign up to the petition against the college cuts at www.unison-scotland.org.uk/fe

Only a balanced energy strategy for Scotland will keep the lights on

That's the message from UNISON Scotland in a strategy document calling for 'a new realism and sanity' in the energy debate.

UNISON argues that a sustainable Scottish energy strategy has to be based on a planned market for energy, not just to achieve security of supply - but to ensure jobs, deal with climate change and end fuel poverty.

Scotland's Energy - Scotland's Future: a balanced energy strategy for Scotland identifies the many challenges and opportunities for Scotland's energy sector and sets out a

detailed set of proposals for a unique Scottish energy strategy - including a call for devolution of energy powers to the Scottish Parliament.

Dave Watson, Head of Bargaining and Campaigns, said: "There needs to be a new realism and sanity in the energy debate in Scotland. Far too many organisations oppose proven energy generation in favour of future technologies that are not contributing the capacity required to meet our energy needs.

"That will inevitably lead to a crisis in security of supply with devastating economic consequences.

"Privatisation and liberalisation of the energy market are not the panacea that governments believe them to be. They will not deliver a planned energy policy and have not enabled alternative generation to make a significant new contribution to our energy requirements.

"UNISON Scotland has argued for increased funding to support clean-coal, the full range of renewables and investment in the right skills and specialities. We urge the Parliament to pursue policies that support a balanced and sustainable approach to energy generation and use, and which promote future investment across

the energy sector in Scotland."

Danny Gillespie, chair of UNISON's Scottish Utilities Committee said: "We need democratic accountability to ensure that long term public interest is put ahead of short term commercial gain.

"The Climate Change (Scotland) Act which UNISON campaigned for long and hard is a good start in tackling climate change - but we need stronger public duties and more support for Green Workplaces."

"The Scottish Parliament has an important role to play in developing a sustainable Scottish energy



Edinburgh victory

.. and Aberdeen too?

After a two year campaign, UNISON has welcomed Edinburgh City Council's vote to support in-house bids for vital services instead of privatisation.

In January, the council backed a joint Labour-SNP move, with Green Party backing, to overturn plans by the ruling Lib Dem led coalition to award a contract for Integrated Facilities Management to private bidder Mitie.

Alongside this, the ruling group dumped plans to privatise Corporate and Transactional Services. This followed the victory in November when Environmental Services was kept in-house after a campaign to protect up to 4,000 jobs overall.

Branch President John Stevenson told councillors: "We think it is right that quality public services are delivered by a public service team directly accountable to the people of Edinburgh through their elected councillors. We think it is right that our taxes should go directly to services, to the people who deliver them and the people who rely on them, rather than to profits and shareholders.

UNISON's Peter Hunter said: "This is the death of Scotland's largest council privatisation proposal ever which, given the NHS position, begs the question whether the door is permanently closed on future privatisation plans across the public sector as a whole?"

John added: "We were keenly aware of the danger for the rest of Scotland in private companies got a foothold in Edinburgh.

"The lessons from the 'Our City's Not For Sale' campaign is that basic organising, research, education, campaigning, lobbying and demonstrations need to work alongside strong support for bargaining and representation. No one part of it will deliver by itself", added John.

● **STOP PRESS ABERDEEN:** On 15 March, Aberdeen UNISON was celebrating the City's Finance and Resources Committee decision to terminate the council's privatisation process. The decision will go to full council in April but branch secretary Karen Davidson was assured that privatisation plans are now dead.

strategy. Devolved responsibilities already include the environment, planning, education and training, economic development and, not least, sustainable development - all of which impact on and interface with UK energy policy. And we support the devolution of energy powers to the Scottish Parliament."

Danny added: "And in the face of crazy austerity economics, pay freezes and cuts, and rocketing fuel costs, we need a much better co-ordinated drive against the blight of fuel poverty which affects one in three Scottish households. We need new initiatives to ensure that fuel poverty is eradicated."

For Real Democracy : UNISON's Local Government manifesto shows the way

We've heard a lot about democracy in recent weeks. Shamefully, but not very surprisingly, Local Government gets few mentions in these discussions.

The services local government provides are used by all, vital for many - and being cut back. We need to make them the top of the political agenda.

There are elections in May and we need to put politicians, and would be politicians, on the spot.

What matters isn't how misty eyed candidates can get about Independence.

Likewise, it hardly matters how lyrical they can wax about the potential benefits of Devo Max, Devo Plus or Devo Third Party Fire & Theft. What matters is what they will do to protect public

services, those who use them and those who deliver them.

We need to see a renewed political purpose from Scotland's councillors. They are not elected to manage local authorities (councils employ people to do that).

If councillors are going to shrug their shoulders and say that there is nothing they can do - then we are entitled to ask precisely what councillors are for.

Councillors should not be passive administrators of a cuts package determined elsewhere - but champions of their areas, their authorities and the services their local populations rely on. They should be in the forefront of making 'austerity' unworkable - campaigning to protect services with those who use them and those who deliver them.

That said, laying blame at the door of councillors is not

Local Government can support our communities through this crisis - Our 'For Public Services' manifesto helps explain how, says UNISON Scottish Secretary Mike Kirby



sufficient. It is the task of all of us - as service users and service providers, union members and citizens, to work together to create an environment where it is resisting rather than implementing cuts that councillors see as their only option.

UNISON Scotland wants to see a renewed purpose and vision in local authorities.

To start a debate about democracy based not around airy generalities but firmly grounded: in the needs of communities, the requirements of our young people and the concerns of our elderly.

We have published a

manifesto that we believe points a way forward for local government - through the principles of Democracy, Fairness, Excellence, Partnership and Investment.

This manifesto is an excellent tool for branches and communities to take to candidates and political parties and test their claims to represent the common good.

Local government can support our communities through this crisis - and help lead the way out. Our 'For Public Services' manifesto helps explain how. See the manifesto at www.unison-scotland.org.uk

Ann corners Clegg on welfare concerns

by Fiona Montgomery
Information Devt Officer

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg was lobbied on welfare reform by UNISON's Ann Wardlaw at the Scottish Liberal Democrats conference in Inverness.

Ann, vice chair of the Disabled Members Committee, told him and Chief Secretary to the Treasury Danny Alexander about one way they could act to safeguard the most vulnerable.

UNISON is concerned at the impact of the proposal to deliver the new Universal Credit largely through an online claims system and wants the option for local face to face support to be retained.

Housing benefit is one of the range of benefits being brought together into Universal Credit. UNISON represents members who currently work in local authorities administering housing benefit services. The



union says that the expertise of these staff should be used in retaining local access for claiming Universal Credit.

Ann said: "Benefit cuts in the Welfare Reform Bill have horrified those of us who want a more equal society.

"On top of such devastating cuts though, is the worry that

many people will not be assisted to claim support that they are entitled to because of the switch to a largely online system.

"We asked Nick Clegg and Danny Alexander to ensure that there is an option still under the new system for local face to face support for a range of aspects of the claim service,

including verifying and scanning documents such as tenancy agreements, and help with queries."

Dave Watson, Head of Bargaining and Campaigns, said: "Half the 9.5 million people in social housing have never used the internet.

"Attempting to deliver 80% of Universal Credit claims online and most of the rest in distant call centres simply won't work.

"We believe it is vital to keep a local delivery mechanism, including using the experienced staff in local authority housing benefit services. The Government seems unaware of the high level of face to face interaction these staff have with claimants.

"There is a real risk that without access to proper support, people who could be getting help will lose out, leading to severe financial problems, major stress and potentially homelessness."

UNISON members win BBC Sport Unsung Heroes Award

by Stephen Smellie
South Lanarkshire Branch

UNISON members pop up everywhere.

Just before Gary Lineker announced that Mark Cavendish was the Sports Personality of the Year, up pops Ian Mirfin, UNISON South Lanarkshire Branch member and his partner, retired Glasgow City Branch member, Janice Eaglesham, as the winners of the Unsung Heroes Award.

The award recognises and rewards outstanding contribution by individuals at the grassroots level of local sport, who give up their time on a voluntary basis so that

sport can be enjoyed across the country.

The pair formed the Red Star Athletics Club in Glasgow 21 years ago and the club has trained more than 150 disabled athletes over the years.

Ian, who works with South Lanarkshire Council has been a UNISON member since he started working in the Council and is an active supporter of the union in the workplace. He told *Scotland in UNISON*, "It was very exciting meeting other public sector workers like Gary Lineker. Mind you I don't imagine he has too many worries about his pension!"



Earth Hour 2012

On Saturday 31 March lights will go off for an hour at iconic landmarks



around the world - and on the UNISON Scotland website!

Earth Hour 2012 is WWF's annual hour-long power switch-off that has become a global phenomenon with a key environmental message.

Edinburgh Castle and many other Scottish landmarks will be plunged into darkness from 8.30pm to show support for tackling climate change.

All Scottish councils are signed up this year, with the Scottish Government encouraging all public bodies to get involved.

This year WWF and UNISON Scotland put together a special pack for branches, available on both websites.

It is a great event to get involved in as part of green workplace campaigning - and the pack can also be used to start planning early for Earth Hour 2013!

Scottish Labour – redefining core values? UNISON speaking up for public service workers

by John Stevenson
SIU Editor

The Scottish Labour Conference heard UNISON seek to redefine the party's focus onto the basic issues of unfairness and inequality.

UNISON speakers drove debates on pensions, cuts, the need to challenge the economic myths behind the ideological attack on public services and the welfare state – and of course what kind of Scotland we want in the future.

UNISON's Gordon McKay took up the theme that Scottish Labour needs to push its vision of fairness and social justice: "It is inexcusable that public sector workers should take more pay freezes and pay cuts. We will not blame public sector workers for the greed of bankers. Scottish Labour must work with the trade unions on fair pay and that does not mean a pay freeze!"

The attacks on local government were at the front of Johann Lamont's first speech as leader as she grasped the issues affecting Labour's core support. "In Alex Salmond's progressive Scotland, he took a two per cent cut from the Tories, doubled it and handed it to Scotland's councils. We are seeing the consequences of these decisions in our communities every day", she said.

As Scotland's NHS workers geared up for more action on pensions, Gordon called for Labour support and warned Nicola Sturgeon (Cabinet Secretary for Health), "It's decision time Nicola. Are you on the side of the Tories and their business friends, or low paid NHS workers?"

"If you are willing to sit down with us and talk meaningfully about a Scottish solution to these unfair contribution rises to pensions, then UNISON will call off its industrial action. If not - be assured that our members will know what an independent Scotland would look like."

Independence?

The constitutional debate permeated the conference with a drive to define what kind of Scotland we want to live in.

Mike Kirby, STUC President, said that should be defined by "Where there is quality of life for all, in peace and progress. That will define the best system to achieve our goals, and the best system of governance, not historical romance, not a reaction to the views of others. And born of confidence in ourselves, not a fear of future options or scare stories".

Developing a vision of the sort of Scotland we want to live in, then measuring the constitutional options against that vision, is exactly what UNISON's Scottish Council of branches will be doing in a special session on 14 April.

Learning the key to organising



Opening of new UNISON Learning Centre

Lilian Macer, Jim Burnett, Nancy Kelly, John Keggie and Lynne Rankin with Serena Kosewsky's artwork

by Malcolm Burns
Acting Communications Officer

Convener Lilian Macer opened UNISON's impressive new Learning Centre on Friday 9 March.

She was joined by chair of the Learning and Organising Committee Lynne Rankin, Scottish Organiser John Keggie and Regional Organiser Nancy Kelly and a host of activists and staff in the recently-converted top floor of the Belford Road office in Edinburgh at an informal early evening reception.

Lilian said: "I'm delighted to open this new Learning Centre. My first step into union activity was going on a Return to Learn course. I wouldn't be standing here now if not for that opportunity. It led me on to study at Glasgow Caledonian University and achieve my Master's Degree - and it spurred me to become an activist and eventually Convener."

The new Learning Centre is a

highly flexible venue which has been realised as a large bright attic space with excellent IT and conference facilities, breakout and exhibition areas. Discreet room dividers provide for smaller groups.

It can be used for education and training, and also organising, campaigning and social events. It was brought back into use in 2011 for the Mobilise festival and the legacy from that was assured by funding from UNISON's FDO fund.

Lilian Macer also unveiled an artwork by UNISON member Serena Kosewsky which features Scotland superimposed with union and political badges - part of an art/archive project for badge collections which had been on display at Mobilise last year.

Contact Helen Stewart
h.stewart@unison.co.uk 0131 226 0075 for details on how to access this outstanding Learning Centre resource - and use it to develop our main strength: our members.

NHS Scotland at 'leading edge' of industrial relations

by John Gallacher
Scottish Organiser

The NHS Scotland partnership system of industrial relations is "a leading edge example" of innovation which leads to "improving public service delivery". That's the view of Nottingham University Business School academics Prof Nicolas Bacon and Dr Peter Samuel.

Their recent report 'Partnership in NHS Scotland 1999-2011'* studied ten years' worth of time, effort and commitment by the Scottish Government Health Department, NHS employers and trade unions at all levels. They conclude that partnership working benefits the role and reputation of unions in health workplaces; advantages workers and union members in the world of work; and improves the service delivered to patients.

"As the longest established and most extensive set of partnership arrangements in the British public sector," write

Bacon and Samuel, "NHS Scotland provides a leading edge example of the extent to which innovative industrial relations arrangements may contribute towards improving public service delivery."

They claim that partnership in NHS Scotland has "matured into probably the most ambitious and important contemporary innovation in British public sector industrial relations."

As the trade union side chair of the Scottish Partnership Forum in the NHS, I believe partnership working does not require unions to leave our independent credentials at the doorstep - or to surrender traditional industrial responses where there is failure to agree on pay and other terms of employment, including pensions. Indeed, recent events have shown that the partnership model can survive major dispute. The system allows for disputes to be managed, and partnership around wider workforce and service delivery issues to be preserved.

But partnership faces new

challenges. Public sector reform and future integration of health and social care will produce an interesting test in comparative industrial relations systems between the NHS and local government in Scotland.

As Bacon and Samuel comment: "Integrating health and social care in the years ahead will bring together two very different sets of industrial relations arrangements."

"It is probably over-optimistic to assume partnership arrangements will simply transfer from the health service into local authorities... (but) over-pessimistic to assume that partnership in NHS Scotland will not diffuse into the work streams that will flow from integrating services."

Along with integration, issues like procurement and outsourcing of services to third sector employers form a challenging landscape for partnership employee relations. For unions like UNISON, with our spheres of influence spanning all these sectors, these will be interesting times.

* *Partnership in NHS Scotland 1999-2011*, Nottingham University, Jan 2012 - pdf at <http://goo.gl/He5lw>

The Happy Lands: Fife community creates ground breaking movie

by John Stevenson
SiU Editor

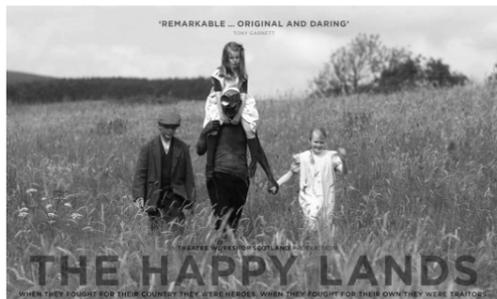
Three public service workers are on the verge of movie stardom with the launch of a ground-breaking film set in Fife during the 1926 General Strike.

The community-led feature film by Theatre Workshop Scotland, directed by Robert Rae, links professional film makers with first-time locals who have owned the project. The community has not only taken on major acting roles but contributed to the research, writing, costumes, set building - including a whole street of miners' cottages - and other 'behind camera' jobs.

Due to be released this year, 'The Happy Lands' is set in the Fife coalfields and follows the journey of one mining community as they are forced into conflict with the coal company as they fight longer hours for less pay in a seven month lock out.

The story of three families shows the human consequences of an impersonal economics in 1926 that resonates with what is happening now in 2012.

For three of the first-time actors this has been a journey of emotion and self discovery. Craig Seath who plays Dr McCrae is a UNISON member working in environmental health in West Lothian. Jokie Wallace (Dan Guthrie) is a member at Carnegie College and Kevin Clarke (Michael Brogan) was a nurse till he gave up work to be a full time dad.



Top: Craig Seath as Dr McCrae, Left: Jokie Wallace as Dan Guthrie and Kevin Clarke as Michael Brogan.

Jokie Wallace: "I can't see it happening again for many years".

Meeting the three in a pub in Cowdenbeath on a cold winter evening, the passion for the project shone through - along with the parallels with the present day. To them it was more than just a film. Much more.

They recalled the energy, enthusiasm and then the apprehension as the project developed. The importance of what they were doing sank in when Tony Garnett, producer of Ken Loach's award winning film 'Kes', told them their project was unique. "It's a first in the world, so don't bugger it up!" he warned.

It didn't do much for the apprehension but it did underline that something special was happening. "It is a one-off", agreed

only seven years after the slaughter of the trenches, as miners' unions led the country against savage cuts by a Liberal/Tory government.

"It is like what is happening now", reflected Craig Seath who got involved after seeing a flyer for the project in High Valleyfield: "History is repeating itself as cuts follow the financial crisis".

So are there lessons for trade unions today? Craig thinks so: "It's about people understanding what's happening, what the effect is on them. Maybe it's about trying to get more engaged with communities. There was more of a community spirit in 1926".

A view backed up by Kevin Clarke: "People spoke to each other more. The work was in the

community, people travelled to and from work together and socialised together. It gave community support".

This was all the more important in a context where law-abiding citizens found themselves as law-breakers in a battle against the state. The actors' own research of census records showed how big the build up of troops had been in the area at the time.

It is perhaps no surprise, as Jokie pointed out, that future employers' strategies were to separate the workplaces from communities.

Craig had an interesting take on why people were more politically aware than they appear to be today. Not only were they forced into a political awakening by the human circumstances but, "The politicians lived in the community, they were literally people's neighbours so there was more interaction", he explained.

Community core

The film developed from an idea by Robert Rae. In 2009 he started talking to people in the Fife communities, floating the idea for the film, holding public meetings, running a press campaign and directly involving local people. Over a hundred attended some Sunday sessions.

As Helen Trew from Theatre Workshop Scotland explains: "The community are absolutely core - we could not make it without them. It's their story, it's their history."

For Jokie Wallace, the idea had a very personal relevance. His family worked in the pits and he recalls

stories from his grandfather of the 1926 strike. The film has an authenticity woven from real life stories, people and events (not necessarily all in the strike) and Jokie's family's story is part of that.

"I saw an advert in the paper and I'd always been interested in politics and trade unions but I'd never done anything like this before. The professionals were brand new and would take you through the process. There was a great spirit with the crew."

Kevin added: "There was great mutual support. Everyone helped each other". And Craig was clear about the importance of what they were doing: "I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't felt we'd done justice to the history. People were in it for the right reasons. There was a great feeling of working for each other".

As well as the actors, the film has another UNISON connection. Ex national UNISON officer Bill Gilby helped with some of the research after his retirement from the union. He said: "The film tells the story I was trying to write about all those years ago as a student. For me it was unfinished business".

The film will have a Cast and Crew Gala Screening in the Alhambra Dunfermline on 8 June followed by TV screenings in October. See more at www.thehappylands.com/ and donate at www.justgiving.com/Theatre-Workshop-Fife

We want to hear your news

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