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scottish council activists bulletin

Scotland in UNISON

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Pensions action forces new talks

by Chris Bartter
 Communications Officer

A breakthrough in negotiations between the joint unions and local government employers at UK level has led to the suspension of the UK-wide action on 25-27 April, including the Scottish strike on 26 April.

As we went to print, Scottish branches were due to meet on 24 April to hear an update on talks.

UNISON's Industrial Action committee agreed to suspend the strike action because the joint union/LGA statement provides a framework for detailed negotiations on the future of the local government pension scheme and full protection for existing scheme members.

Separate discussions

are taking place in Scotland with the Scottish Executive, the SPPA and CoSLA to build on this UK position and resolve the matter here.

Matt Smith, UNISON's Scottish Secretary said, "We welcome the shift in the employer's position. There is a lot of detailed work and negotiations to be done over the coming weeks."

"The show of solidarity in the action on March 28 and the likelihood of similar support on 26 April has achieved this breakthrough.

"We trust that employers and government throughout the UK will use this time to establish protection for LGPS members that mirrors that received by other public sector workers."

Meat Hygiene

The week long threatened strike of meat inspec-



Thousands at Edinburgh rally on 28 March: Rallies were held across Scotland from Shetland to Dumfries: See www.unison-scotland.org.uk/pensions for photos and quotes from around the country

tors across the UK kick-started the offer of talks from English local government employers and the UK government. UNISON's Scottish Council congratulated the members of the MHS in Scotland, for their

solid commitment to the action and their resistance to the threats, intimidation and smears, voiced by the MHS and the meat industry.

Mike Kirby, UNISON's Scottish Convenor said "MHS members deserve

our thanks and congratulations for leveraging this step forward.

"Let us hope that government and employers realise that they have allowed them a breathing space. Use it well."

Report backs nursery nurses

A research report commissioned by UNISON has confirmed all the union has been saying about nursery nurse pay and conditions.

"It's great to have this report that shows we were right all along", said nursery nurse leader Carol Ball.

The report questions the salaries paid to Scotland's nursery nurses in light of the changing nature of their roles and responsibilities.

It also finds no obvious rationale for paying different rates in different authorities.

A basic grade nursery nurse's pay can vary by almost £3,000, despite most of the job being defined by national standards.

The report comes before the the outcome of the Executive's Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce set up after the year-long nursery nurse dispute which brought pay rises in every council, but no Scotland-wide scale.

Undervalued

Dr Patricia Findlay, one of the authors of the research, said "For the first time we now have evidence of what Scottish nursery nurses actually do. There is convincing evidence that most nursery nurses are actually carrying out the roles and responsibilities envisioned in the Early Years Review Roles and Responsibilities Framework.

"They undertake a highly responsible, important and challenging job, which requires high level skills and capabilities, in a committed and professional manner. Yet much of their work is under-recognised and under-valued."

* Report Summary at www.unison-scotland.org.uk/localgovt/nurserynurse

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Executive must come up with cash for equal pay

The STUC backed UNISON's call for the Scottish Executive to fully fund a fair, equal pay scheme for Scottish Local Government staff to match what had been done in other public services.

UNISON Scottish convenor Mike Kirby called for more funding for councils so they can pay low-paid women compensation for past pay discrimination, and modernise pay for the future.

Mike said, "So why is this motion moved by a middle-aged, middle earnings male in a suit?"

"Well, being middle-aged I can remember the seventies when a political slogan said 'You're either part of the problem or part of the solution to



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The Equal Pay Act was enacted in 1970 but 35 years on we still await its promise
 Mike Kirby

the problem - and given that part of the solution to the problem of pay inequality will affect all including middle-aged, middle earning males in suits - that's why".

"The Equal Pay Act was enacted in 1970. 35 years on we still await its promise. And eight years after an agreement we still await the implementation of the proposed solution".

poorer than they would be have been if councils had done their job - no their legal duty."

"We know who is responsible. Will they sort it out in Local Government, and avoid a similar travesty in Health and Higher education?" asked Mike.

If this funding does not happen local authorities will be forced to cut services, increase council tax and/or cut staff pay

and conditions, in order to pay millions in compensation across Scotland.

The need to resolve the increasing equal pay bill is becoming more pressing as time moves on. One-off payments achieved through commercial law firms for a fee will neither deliver fair equal pay schemes in authorities, nor will they help people who do not wish to pursue individual claims.

The calls from the Finance Committee for the Minister to fund equal pay in local government cannot be ignored. "Only the Executive, with the councils, can move this forward", said Mike.

UNISON's call was backed by the T&GWU and the GMB.

Help bring dignity to Zimbabwean women in their fight

Being a woman in Zimbabwe is like going to war with a gun minus bullets.

Sanitary towels are now threatening the Zimbabwean woman's livelihood.

Zimbabwean trade unionist Tabitha Khumalo told the STUC, "On a wage of £3, with sanitary towels costing £3, women have to choose between sanitary towels or food for their children. You know what they choose".

In an emotional speech, she said that, with the help of trade unions, Zimbabwean women were restoring their dignity.

"I am weeping but these are not tears of sadness, they are tears of joy because you will help us", she said.

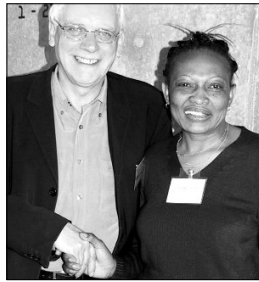
"I wore that black eye as a trophy - proof that I was doing something right"

Tabitha Khumalo

Tabitha was brought to the STUC by the Amicus union and she moved delegates to tears as she asked them to "support our campaign, restore dignity to Zimbabwean women so that we can fight this dictator and have our right to be human beings".

She also slammed the treatment of Zimbabwean women who have failed to get asylum in Britain.

"To leave your family and your children must show the des-



Tabitha Khumalo discusses support for the campaign with UNISON Communications Chair John Stevenson

peration of these women".

Tabitha spoke of the pressures of being a woman and a trade unionist in Zimbabwe and how she was beaten up by an organ-

ised group at a meeting.

"I got a black eye and I wore that black eye as a trophy - proof that I was doing something right", she said.

Turning to the political situation and the taking over of farms, she warned, "This was for power, dressed up as being about black and white race issue. It was nothing to do with race. It was to break our 1.5 million members in agriculture and break our challenge to the government", she said.

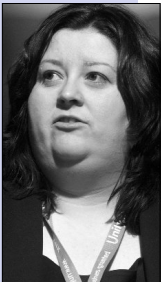
Dignity. Period!

You can help the *Dignity. Period!* campaign by logging on to the ACTSA website at www.actsa.org/Get_involved/zimbabwe_sanitary_campaign.htm and making a donation.

Act together on public service pay

Public service unions need to act together to challenge cuts in funding for pay, the STUC was told.

Seconding a motion from the PCS union, UNISON's Katrina Purcell said, "In a number of negotiating forums, UNISON



Katrina Purcell

has found they have had to deal with not only the employers but the holders of the purse strings - the Scottish Executive."

Time and time again there has been sympathy that they want to pay more but the brakes are put on by the government.

In a message to government, Katrina demanded, "If you want to control, at least have the decency to sit at the table".

School behaviour needs resource response

The STUC has called for more resources to protect school staff and to manage and support children with behaviour problems.

UNISON's Kate Ramsden found herself seconding one teaching union's (EIS) amendment to another teaching union's (NASUWT) motion after NASUWT accepted the amendment, then stunned Congress by speaking against it.

Kate explained UNISON's opposition to the motion and won backing for the amendment.

"UNISON shares the concerns about the personal safety of staff in schools, including classroom assistants who are often the ones providing support to pupils with behaviour problems.

"However, we are not convinced the motion will address the real problems either for the staff or the children concerned.

It did not define terms like 'anti-social behaviour' or 'zero tolerance'. Kate warned these terms, "can have widely different meanings to different people. One person's minor irritation is another's antisocial behaviour."

Kate called for backing for schools that try to understand children with behaviour issues and a multi-agency response to deal with the underlying problems that lead to such behaviour.

Action to stop the temporary contract trap

The STUC was urged to push for mass conversion of fixed-term to permanent contracts as the new rules come in on 10 July this year.



Gillian Dick

The regulations mean that from 10 July 2006 anyone with more than 4

years' service, on at least their second contract (or on a contract that has been previously renewed or extended) can regard their post as permanent unless their employer can 'objectively justify' the continued use of a fixed-term contract.

UNISON's Gillian Dick, backing the Association of University Teachers, told delegates, "Two million temporary workers in the UK today are victims of employment loopholes which leave them with low pay, stagnant careers and uncertain futures. They are caught in the temporary contract trap".

"We believe that the way forward for most organisations is a stable staffing policy through negotiation and agreement."

That policy should include:-

- Only using temp contracts when it can be proved they are absolutely necessary.
- Better still, only using temp contracts for maternity or ill-health cover.

Gillian also slammed the short term and ring fenced funding in local government that forces so many fixed term contracts when the services clearly need to be mainstreamed and permanent.

Jack arrives on cue as our Matt defends public sector

UNISON Scotland secretary Matt Smith couldn't have timed his defence of the public sector better at the STUC.

First Minister Jack McConnell arrived on the stage just as Matt was saying, "The First Minister was quoted recently as saying there was a need to rebalance the Scottish economy, not by shrinking the public sector but by growing the private sector."

The rumble in the hall alerted Matt to the fact that Jack McConnell had arrived and he added: "Well, Jack, you're mostly right. We need to recognise evidence suggests the private sector grows best when the public sector is a major generator.

"It's time the business community moved on from their narrowly focused and self-interested arguments."

Matt reminded delegates that the public sector actually



Jack McConnell and Matt Smith face to face on public services

stimulates and supports business through research, education and buying goods.

"The business community too often call for cuts in public spending when what they really want is a bigger slice of the cake for themselves, via contracting or, at the extreme end, PFI/PPP."

UNISON had launched a report that provides evidence that challenges the claim that public sector spending in some

way 'crowds out' private investment.

Matt stressed it was long past time that business and right - wing commentators stopped "dogmatic and unevoked attacks" on the public sector, and moved the debate on to a more informed analysis of the interaction between public and private sectors in a successful economy.

See the report at www.unison-scotland.org.uk/addingvalue.html

Borders home care in privatisation threat

UNISON Scotland has slammed a leaked report that threatens to privatise part of Borders Council's Home care service and make low-paid home carers redundant.

Branch Chair Edith Moody said; "It is no wonder that the council wants to keep this report secret.

"Threatening to privatise sections of the workforce who have legitimate equal pay claims is an underhand way of running away from their responsibility.

"Borders Home care service is an excellent service, valued highly by those who receive it. To suggest replacing a highly

qualified service driven by the needs of the Borders, with one driven by the need to make a profit for a private company, is not 'Best Value'

"Councils in England have tried this tactic and it has only ended up with more cases going to tribunal and a far poorer service to the people.

"The Borders' public value this service, and attempts to sell it off in order to cut it and avoid responsibility in paying these low-paid women the decent wage they should have been paying for years, will only lead to anger and more bad publicity for the Council", added Martin Smith, Branch Communications Officer.

Walk the loch



In April 2005 over 60 UNISON members and friends walked the 14 miles round the beautiful surroundings of Loch Katrine, making thousand of pounds for UNISON Welfare's Bucket and Spade appeal. Now they're doing it again on Sunday 21 May this year. To register for this event then please contact: Kevin O'Neil, UNISON House, 14 West Campbell Street Glasgow G2 6RX k.oneil@unison.co.uk 0870 7777 006

Ring-fencing no solution to cuts

We must fight against cuts in education expenditure but we also need to avoid ring-fencing that undercuts core services.

This was UNISON's Bob Revie's message to the STUC in an amendment accepted by the EIS teachers' union.

"Ring fencing of budget allocations prevents local authorities from deciding their own priorities and finding local solutions to their problems", said Bob.

"We strongly believe that allocating money for specific projects

undermines and undercuts the core services being delivered by local government".

Ring-fencing does not protect jobs and services it just lets central government take even more control of local services.

"The Scottish Executive cannot micromanage local services. People want more, not less say in their local services.

"Local government should have more, not less control over

People want more, not less say in their local services

Bob Revie



spending decisions so giving people more control over services in their areas", insisted Bob.

That way it would be more accountable to its electorate for its spending decisions, including any cuts in education.

'Momentous occasion' as Palestinian and Israeli trade unionists meet

UNISON's Mike Kirby hosted 'momentous' meetings at the STUC bringing together reps from the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) and the Israeli Histradut trade union federation

"It is a momentous occasion to have representatives of the Histradut and the PGFTU together at the STUC", Mike told the congress in Perth.

UNISON Scotland had given financial support to make the dialogue possible and hosted a fringe meeting on workers' rights in Palestine, the Occupied Territories and Israel.

The PGFTU's Wael Natheef told delegates, "I am proud and honoured to bring greetings from your friends in Palestine".

He was grateful for the help of Scottish unions in the struggle to 'build democratic life' for the Palestinians.

Unemployment stands at 50% and 70% of

Palestinians live below the poverty line. 93,000 Palestinians have been thrown out of work because of the 'wall and green line' cutting them off from jobs in Israel.

The Histradut's Nawaf Massalha also thanked Scottish unions. "Colleagues, you have taken us into your hearts... to make it a very important few days with you."

I am against the humiliation of Palestinians

Nawaf Massalha

Nawaf, an ex member of the Knesset (Israeli parliament) spoke of the first agreement between the Histradut and the PGFTU in 1995. This needed to be built upon.

In a proud and direct statement Nawaf said, "I am against the humiliation of Palestinians, I support a Palestinian state".

Workers in Israel were suffering from the policies of the government but there may be some promise ahead with half of the Knesset now supporting decent pensions and a fair



L to R: Mike Kirby (UNISON and STUC) introduces Nawaf Massalha (Histradut), Bayer Sa'id Bayer and Wael Natheef (PGFTU) to First Minister Jack McConnell.

minimum wage.

Nawaf thanked the unions for their support and called on them to continue to help "For Israel and Palestine to be together as workers... We are more than neighbours".

Later, delegates were able to get round the table with the guests and debate a range of issues such as:

- The huge travel and work problems faced by Palestinians created by

checkpoints and military roads.

- The effects of Israeli government divide and rule policies on stability for the Palestinians but also for Israeli workers.

- The relationships between the largely Fatah PGFTU and the new Hamas government.

In conversations with the sessions, Wael spoke with pride of bringing together Israeli,

Palestinian and French children to a summer camp organised by the French CGT union.

"These children are our future and we need to build understanding for the future", he said.

The meetings ended in a firm agreement to build and drive forward union links and understanding.

"To hear this brave dialogue was humbling" was one delegate's response.

Irresponsible 'off the wall' decisions about NHS funds

Funding private contracts with £45 million that could have been used by the NHS is 'irresponsible', UNISON Scotland vice-convenor Lillian Macer told Congress.

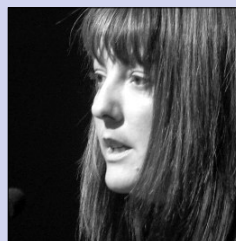
Trade unions and professional organisations are worried about the 'much needed' money going to private contracts to support Independent Sector Treatment Centres.

"These contracts will be run and managed by private providers of health care, the

staff used to deliver the care will be drawn from the NHS, a much needed resource we cannot afford to lose", said Lillian.

"It is totally irresponsible for the Health Department to be making these off the wall decisions about NHS funding without any real evidence of service improvements", she added.

Already the English Health Department has started an agenda that has seen services privatised while front-line NHS



Lillian Macer

staff are being made redundant.

"Survey after survey shows that the public support an NHS based on need and free

Be proud of public services

In his opening speech to the STUC conference, president John Keenan rallied to the support of public services.

"We cannot accept an argument which is predicated on private sector good, public sector bad," he said.

"We should be proud to have a public sector with a commitment to a level of security, security of employment and security in retirement.

"That is why a fair deal for some public service workers should be a fair deal for all public service workers."

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STUC reports by
John Stevenson
SiU Editor

Disabled access must be implemented

All premises and venues used by unions should meet best practice for accessibility. David Hop (UNISON and STUC Disabled Members) urged that this statement should be more than just words.

"The General Council must take steps to ensure these recommendations are implemented fully", he said.

Information right must cover all services

Increasing charges for Freedom of Information would undermine the accountability the Act has brought, the STUC was told.

The STUC will now challenge any government review that increases charges.

UNISON Scotland took it a step further by demanding that all public service providers should be included.

UNISON's Mags Dunbar said, "We were assured by governments that public services provided from outside local authorities would be included but as yet they have not.

"No private contractor, community and voluntary organisation, or indeed even some quasi public bodies like housing associations, are covered by the law.

"We don't believe this is good enough. Being open and transparent shouldn't only cover the public sector itself, it should be part of the contract".

Mags won one of the warmest receptions of the congress, fighting on through her speech with the unforgettable line "Just talk among yourselves till I adjust my denture". A true professional!

STUC's corporate killing law plea

The STUC have urged Scottish ministers to make a new law on corporate killing a priority.

STUC health and safety officer Ian Tasker told delegates:

"This issue has been high on our priorities for many years.

"Since the Piper Alpha tragedy in 1988 the trade union movement has campaigned for legislation and we urge the executive to progress this as a matter of urgency."

Progress on asylum seekers' children campaign

The next step in UNISON Scotland's campaign for the welfare of asylum seeker's children to be paramount, was reached when the STUC General Council backed a statement agreed by three unions.

UNISON's Kate Ramsden told delegates, "We have welcomed the recent announcement by the Immigration Minister of a series of measures which have been agreed with the Scottish Executive, and which have taken on board UNISON's views.

"These should ensure that children of asylum seekers have the same rights as other children under Scots law."

But the STUC statement was not without its hitches and only came about after days of negotiation with the EIS and NUJ unions.

While the journalists backed UNISON, the teachers could not accept the term 'amnesty' and UNISON's Dave Watson had to find a new form of words.

But Kate made sure congress was aware of UNISON's position. "We make no apologies for using the term 'amnesty' as this is the word used three years ago when a precedent was set and the Home Secretary granted an amnesty to 15,000 asylum seeker families", she said.

"That is why UNISON wel-

comes the General Council statement and the commitment to campaign for a speedier process for asylum applications and for rights of residence for asylum seekers whose claims are not processed within a year."

Progress made

Following reports in the last two *SiUs*, significant progress has been made after UNISON met with civil servants.

The Scottish Executive has confirmed what was agreed



Kate Ramsden

between them and Tony McNulty (UK Immigration Minister) and at UNISON's meeting with them on 23 March, which is:

1. Lead professional for each child and early involvement for asylum seeker children in line with *Getting It Right for Every Child*
2. Review of the removals process (going UK wide)
3. Enhanced disclosure checks for all immigration staff contacting children
4. Independent inspection of services to children
5. Independent inspection of removals process for UK
6. Improved communications and an immigration director for Scotland.

Defend holidays

The STUC backed Karen Whitfield MSP's bill which would ban large stores from opening on Christmas and New Year's Day.

These were important national collective holidays, said UCATT's motion. Ensuring workers could take them off would not just benefit retail staff, it would avoid many more essential workers being forced to work these holidays.

Countering any argument that there may be a cultural conflict, Ravi Nathan (STUC Black Members and UNISON) said,

"Scotland is a diverse and multicultural nation of many different faiths and Christmas and New Year's Day are for many workers a relaxing period to spend with their families and children... irrespective of their religious faiths".

"If I tell you I am a Hindu you will realise Christmas day is therefore not special to me. But I enjoy having the day off to spend with my grown sons who work away from home", added Ravi.



Ravi Nathan

Fuel poverty campaign

Unions will campaign for funding to encourage energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty.



Jim Burnett

The STUC backed a call to improve domestic energy efficiency by 20% and introduce incentives like Council Tax rebates and more grant aid to homeowners and social landlords.

Recent rises in gas prices are already having an impact on the price of energy to Scotland's homes and add an increased urgency to tackle fuel poverty.

"How can pensioners stay healthy if they are scared to turn their heating on?" asked UNISON's Jim Burnett. "Expensive heating bills push families into a spiral of debt", he added.

UNISON believes that current grants for insulation and other efficiency measures should be extended to more people with full grants for the over 60's.

PFI protocol fails to protect workers being 'sold like slaves'

Bogus self-employed labour is being used by contractors on PFI/PPP projects despite the STUC-Scottish Executive protocol that should avoid a two-tier workforce.

Workers are failing to get basic employment conditions with public money being put into private contractors who are disregarding employee rights.

"Private companies are cutting pay and conditions. The protocol is being ignored", said UNISON's Mick McGahey.

The result of the drive for profit meant "cuts in beds and services in the Health Service and Local Government".

And nowhere was that



PHOTO: LOUIS FLOOD

Mick McGahey

better demonstrated than in Edinburgh's new Royal Infirmary.

"The health service in Lothian has to pay £45 million every year to the hospital consortium", Mick

explained.

"It doesn't maintain, it employs sub contractors and the hospital is going down the tubes".

"Less beds, higher costs than in the old system and workers transferred from employer to employer like slaves being sold".

"Our members, these workers have a right to dignity".

The motion from UCATT for a campaign to extend employment rights

to all workers was amended by UNISON to also urge the STUC to call for a joint in-depth review of the protocol with the Executive.

Sponsor a brick for Mary MacArthur

UNISON Scotland has backed a 'sponsor a brick' campaign to honour the memory of Scottish trade unionist Mary MacArthur.

In 1910 the women Chainmakers of Cradley Heath embarked upon a ten week lock-out, led by Mary MacArthur.

The women's campaign and ultimate victory would establish the beginnings of Britain's minimum wage movement.

The strike, which attracted international support, raised almost £3,000 in strike funds - part of which was used to build the Worker's Institute in Lomey Town, Cradley Heath.

The Black Country Living

Museum has now moved to rescue the building by re-locating it to the Museum's 26-acre open-air site in Dudley, hence the 'sponsor a brick' campaign.

Mary MacArthur, was born in Glasgow in 1880. She became active in the shop-workers union and the Independent Labour Party in London where she worked with two other Scots, James Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald. Mary was involved in the Exhibition of Sweated Industries in 1905 and in forming the Anti-Sweating League in 1906.



The following year she founded the Women Worker, a newspaper for women trade unionists. She was an inspirational figure and recruited many women into the movement.

Active in the fight for the vote, she was opposed to accepting the franchise for only certain categories of women.

This made her unpopular with middle class suffragettes who saw limited suffrage as

an important step in the struggle to win the vote.

As Mary MacArthur died at the young age of 40 she has been largely forgotten by the general public. Mary MacArthur's story is one UNISON Scotland wants to bring to a wider audience.

For more on how you can sponsor a brick (for just £10) see www.bclm.co.uk.

For more information on Mary see www.electricscotland.com/history/women/wih28.htm

We want to hear your news

SiU is your paper, we want to hear your stories. Contact: John Stevenson (Editor) 0131 220 5655, Chris Barter 0870 7777 006, FAX PRESS RELEASES to 0141 331 1203
E-mail: webmanager@unison-edinburgh.org.uk

Connect with young Muslims

Unions must connect with young Muslim workers to present a united front against racism and encourage them to join and be active in unions.

UNISON's Craig McNally seconded the call by the STUC Youth Conference and won backing from delegates when he condemned Islamophobia in the backlash from the 9/11 attacks and the July 2005 London bombings.

Praising the 'colour' that diversity has brought our country, Craig warned of the 'weighty challenges' facing us and these could only be met by engaging with young Muslims workers.

Young Muslims are three times more likely to be out of work than the general population

Balanced energy policy backed

The STUC backed a "balanced" energy policy - including new nuclear stations and prolonging the life of existing ones.

The motion from Amicus calling for a mix of energy suppliers in Scotland, was supported by other unions including the National Union of Mineworkers and was carried despite some opposition.

The motion welcomed the UK government's decision to have an energy review.

"The importance of a safe, secure and diverse means of electricity production cannot be over-emphasised", said the motion because of the key role those will play in the future energy costs to the UK economy.

The government needs to "adopt a balanced energy policy to meet the energy needs of the nation".

"This review must include the promotion of clean coal technology and consideration of new nuclear build, as well as oil and gas, and renewables, in order to avert the nation's energy needs being held hostage to politically unstable states."