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*revitalising our public services*

scottish council activists bulletin

# Scotland in UNISON

Sept 2008 No. 74

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## Magnificent strike action brings reopening of talks

by Chris Bartter  
Communications Officer

**The 24 hour stoppage that closed and disrupted council services across Scotland on 20 August has won a reopening of talks with the employers.**

As *SiU* went to print, a meeting of UNISON's Scottish local government branches welcomed the news that council employers had suggested further talks and congratulated the members who went on strike.

Dougie Black, UNISON Regional Officer and Secretary to the TU negotiators said, "We are pleased that CoSLA has approached us to reopen talks on this years pay award, following the successful strike by members of the three unions.

"We also note that the invitation to talks addresses some of the contentious issues. Obviously we want a solution to this dispute, so we hope that discussions around a new offer more acceptable to our members can start quickly."

The meeting of branches welcomed the news but also agreed to maintain the dispute and make preparations for further strike action in the event of any failure of talks.

Dougie said "Members made it very clear on Wednesday that they want a settlement that protects them from inflation and

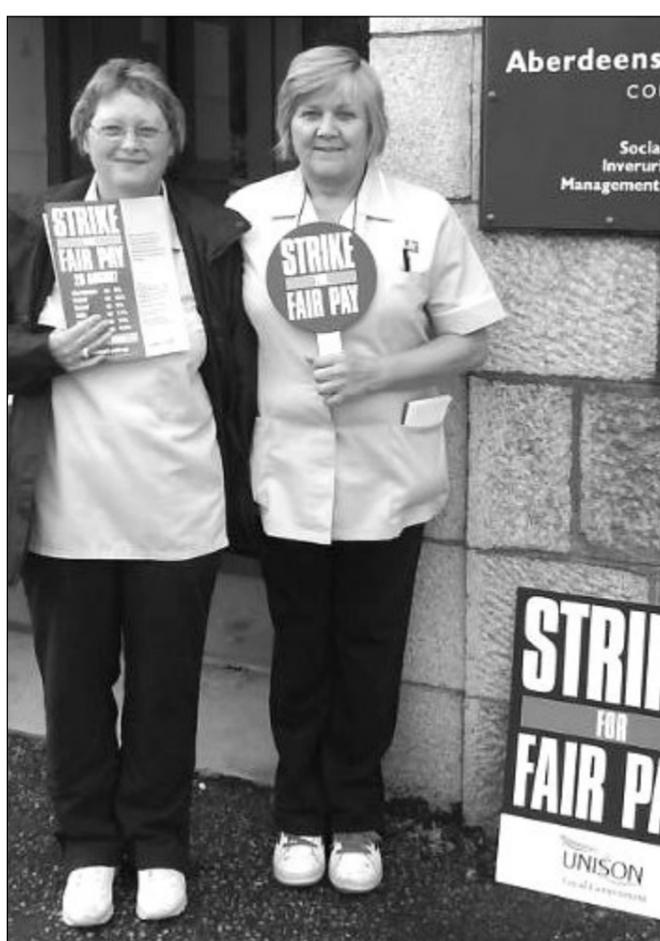


**General Secretary Dave Prentis visits pickets at 07.15 in a very wet Edinburgh. He then headed off across the central belt to visit strikers. Reports from around Scotland on P2 and 3**

does not lock them in to multi-year awards. The talks are welcome but are not in themselves a solution.

"We will be talking to our fellow unions to agree future action should it be required and will announce this later."

The meeting also heard that the strike action had been solidly supported across Scotland with branches reporting new members joining in force and new stewards coming forward.



**Standing together against below inflation offer**

A feature of the strike was the level of anger members felt about pay. Across Scotland, home carers - some of the lowest paid yet most dedicated staff - showed they'd had enough by turning out in force.

Alison Law (right), with fellow home carer Margaret Dale in Aberdeenshire, slammed the pay

offer and told the Inverurie rally that it is simply not enough when inflation is set to reach 5%.

"For too long we have accepted whatever pay rises have been offered to us, even if it felt inadequate. This time, in an economic period when families are starting to suffer, we need to stand together and say NO!"

### OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SAVED

After months of uncertainty and silence UNISON was pleased to learn that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Board members employed in Occupational Health will not be sold off to private healthcare company CAPITA Healthcare Solutions.

UNISON regional organiser Matt McLaughlin said, "Every union affected by this played their part, as did some local MSPs, but at the end of the day this was a decision for people power and common sense."

One UNISON member employed in the service said, "Excellent news. Thanks to UNISON and other unions we've come through this okay. Not only have we benefited from this but so have all NHS employees and ultimately patients too."

And Branch Secretary, Cathy Miller said, "UNISON members work hard providing and supporting the provision of front line services. Our members are getting hammered in some areas if they are on sick leave. An independent in-house occupational health team is crucial to ensuring that our members get the help and assistance they need if they are too ill to work."

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## Glasgow's nurses warn of staffing crisis on the wards

by Matt McLaughlin  
Regional Officer

UNISON's NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde Branch has called for urgent action to address worsening staffing levels across the health board after a UNISON survey of nurses and nursing assistants showed 68% of responders believed that staffing levels for nurses in wards was worse than it was two years ago.

Branch Secretary, Cathy

Miller said, "This is the first ever comprehensive survey of UNISON members who are nurses or nursing assistants working in the NHS in Glasgow and Clyde.

"It is clear from our members' responses that they feel that staffing levels are getting worse and that a significant majority are not confident that their line managers are able to deal positively with their concerns."

UNISON called for employers to take action to address the shortage, warning the issue was likely to lead to other problems in the wards.

Cathy said, "Our nursing members work hard every day and patient wellbeing is at the forefront of their commitment. UNISON is concerned that, unless urgent action is taken to help front line staff, the situation will get worse, staff will get burned out, increasing

the chances of mistakes and more outbreaks of hospital acquired infections. It may also lead to increasing numbers leaving the job. 39% said this was likely.

"NHSGGC needs to take action now to work with UNISON and other unions to improve staffing levels in key areas and to better support staff in the delivery of services." See the report at [www.unionsglasgowclyde.com](http://www.unionsglasgowclyde.com)

## Strike timeline

**00.01:** The strike kicked off at midnight, when concierges began their strike, reported Alex from the Renfrewshire branch on UNISON's strike blog.

**02.40:** Herald newspaper predicts "More than 150,000 local government workers are expected to bring core services across Scotland to a standstill today in the biggest day of industrial action for several years."

**06.40: West Dunbartonshire** texts in the first photo of the day with a cosy looking Margaret Ferris.

**07.00:** The battle bus and ad trailer arrive at the picket at Edinburgh Council HQ. General Secretary Dave Prentis gives the first of his media interviews before visiting other picket lines.



**08.00:** Photo of South Ayrshire's Renee Gillan picketing on holiday in Turkey arrives!

**08.30:** The photos are rolling in. Scenes from Inverurie, Glasgow, Dumfries and Dundee arrive.

**09.00:** A quick check on the google map sees messages of support from Quarriers Branch and from as far away as Torquay.

**10.00** The battle bus brings Dave to West Lothian Council HQ where he gives his main BBC interview of the day, taking on CoSLA.

**10.30** Scottish Convenor Mike Kirby addresses a rally in Paisley. Scottish Organiser John Keggie joins pickets and speaks to a strikers' rally in Inverurie, the ad trailer reaches Aberdeen and a joint rally starts in Motherwell.

**11.00: Inverness Castle** is invaded by Highland strikers who have a joint union rally and a balloon launch.

**11.30:** News comes from Fife that 87 primary schools, 17 secondary schools and 24 local services centres were closed.

**12.00: Dundee** is the focus with a joint rally and complete closedown of services.

**12.30:** Dave Prentis addresses a rally in Glasgow's George Square.

**12.30: Moray** Branch website thanks members. "A big thank you to everyone who went out on strike today - especially those able to attend picket lines".

**15.00:** News update shows huge support across Scotland.

**16.00:** Reports from branches confirm success of strike action as soaked pickets drift home in the south while those in the north go home dry and smug.

**23.00:** BBC reports up to 150,000 members of the GMB, Unite and UNISON unions joined the walkout.



## Action will go on for fair pay, General Secretary tells Edinburgh stewards

**UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis told Edinburgh Council pickets that the industrial action will continue until staff get fair pay.**

The action will continue "until the employers who haven't talked to us for three months, come back round the negotiating table and talk about the real issues affecting their workers - the issue of not being able to pay the bills", said Dave.

Edinburgh Branch President John Stevenson said, "The resounding response to the strike shows just how angry our members are."

"The public response on the picket lines has been fantastic. They clearly understand the fairness of our case".



Photo: Douglas Robertson

UNISON Scottish Secretary Matt Smith shares a joke with pickets, though it was very early, cold, wet, very very wet. The pickets were also joined by Dave Prentis, lead negotiator Dougie Black and newly elected UNISON Vice-President Angela Lynes.

Balloons, a battle bus and a huge ad trailer made it a carnival atmosphere. Oh, but it was wet!

Dave went on to visit pickets at the city chambers and made an attempt to hand out leaflets which pretty soon became pulp as the rain bucketted down.

## From Dumfries to Inverness: The strike in pictures



Photo: Alan Wylie

A pipe band heads the Paisley rally and Scottish Convenor Mike Kirby addresses the rally from his balloon bower.



Inverness Castle is the backdrop for the joint union rally in Highland.



Photo: Alan Cowan

Left: The now famous ad trailer in Dundee. Right: Dumfries members picket the town hall



Photo: Alan Wylie

### If they can beat the mill owners, look out CoSLA

Renfrewshire members make the link to the annual Sma' (Small) Shot Day festival which celebrates the historic victory of the weavers over the mill owners of 19th century Paisley.



Photo: Alan Wylie

## Strike threat wins Glasgow residential workers dispute

All 900 workers in Glasgow Council's homes for older people and children/young people have won wage increases after threatening to take all-out indefinite strike action without emergency cover.

The excellent strike ballot result was 93% in favour on a 52% turnout. The Council knew that the action would

have a devastating impact on services and have agreed to move all workers on to the first pay point of the next grade.

This means immediate increases of between of £829 - £1,582, with progression to the top of the new grades beginning next year but being dependent on a "service modernisation" to be agreed with the trade union over the next three months.

If an agreement is reached on a range of issues by April 2011 the workers will have seen their pay increase by £4,200 - £8,500.

"The workers can be proud of the improvements that they have gained and know that they have the strength to confront the Council again if the circumstances require it. This is the latest example of workers in

Glasgow Council, and in particular within Social Work Services, winning improvements in pay by threatening or actually taking industrial action", said a Glasgow Branch spokesperson.

"It shows once again that workers who are organised and are able to deliver industrial action win the most from their employer."

## Strike blog breaks new ground

For the first time, UNISON members in Scotland could phone, email or text news updates, photos and videos to the website.

A 'google map' showed hundreds of messages of support from across the UK.

With help from colleagues at London HQ, Communications Officer Chris Bartter, Communications Chair John Stevenson and new staff member Malcolm Burns set up special strike day pages and updated them constantly throughout the day.

Members could post messages to the blog and send in photos and videos to the site or to Picasa and YouTube.

See all this at [www.unison-scotland.org.uk](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk) and click on the strike links.



## Strikers thank Health members for support

Across Scotland, members from other services showed their support for the local government strikers.

Tom Waterson, Alex Joyce and Lothian Health members turned out in the early morning to back the Edinburgh strikers.

And in Glasgow, Cathie Miller of the Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Branch handed over a cheque for the strike fund to Local Government Chair Stephanie Herd.



Using the Devil's music. One striker in Paisley converts a well-known advert to make the point.

# You were fantastic!

Strike stories by John Stevenson and Chris Barter

**Council services across Scotland ground to a halt as UNISON members, joined by GMB and Unite colleagues, went on strike on 20 August against a below-inflation pay offer.**

"You were fantastic", UNISON Local Government Chair Stephanie Herd told members at a follow up meeting of branches two days later.

From Shetland to Dumfries, members did not just come out on strike, they made sure the public and the employers knew they were out in strike.

Whether it was in the rain-soaked central belt or the kinder weather in the north, pickets turned up from early morning to make our point.

Rallies, stunts, marches, balloons, a battle bus, ad trailers, fancy dress, bands and music all played their part in getting our message across.

Communications Officer Chris Barter praised branches and officials for;

- their work with the media
- production of material
- organising events,
- the imagination in stunts and cartoons
- new developments in reporting via the website and the blog,

"...and much more which had a big impact on how successful the day was", said Chris.

The 24 hour stoppage affected all council services - schools across Scotland were shut, and many of those that stayed open had limited services - no school meals for example.

Rubbish collection, street cleaning, and environmental protection were halted in many councils, and social work offices and day centres shut.

Housing, leisure and recreation services, home and residential care, libraries, etc were all disrupted as around 150,000 staff took strike action across Scotland.

**In Aberdeen** the main call centre at Woodhill House was closed - covering a large number of services for **Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray.**

**In East Ayrshire** all schools were closed; office staffing was drastically reduced and main depots were closed.

And these stories were repeated across Scotland.

## Emergency help

The union made sure that there was 'life and limb' cover for real emergencies but the unexpected always happens.

And life and limb services were called into action in **Musselburgh**, where the council approached the picket lines and got exemption for staff to go back to work to protect an old people's home from flooding as the River Esk threatened to burst its banks.



Photo: Alan Wylie

## Umbrella campaign in Glasgow's George Square

"It's a disgrace that Scotland's hard-working public sector workers are being singled out for a pay cut," UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis told the Glasgow rally.

Matt Smith - UNISON's Scottish Secretary said, "According to recent media statements it seems that Steven Purcell (Leader of Glasgow City Council) and Michael Cook (Employers' Side Chair) have been impressed by the backing for the strike and the arguments about the levels of inflation."

And two days later, they at last agreed to talks.

"But they need to come back to the unions with clear proposals to address the impact of rising prices on our members", warned Matt.

"If there is no movement then we will have to look to further action in the near future."

**The level of solidarity that I have seen going round the picket lines indicates that our members and their colleagues from the other unions are determined to win a better deal. Council staff in Scotland have delivered nearly £200m worth of efficiency savings that councils should share with staff as well as with council tax payers.**



Dave Prentis, General Secretary

## Dundee shuts down



**Dundee** brings the strike's best photo as Desperate Dan joins the campaign. The strike stopped all bin collections and cleansing and all schools, nurseries and council offices were closed.

UNISON Branch Secretary Rory Malone said, "Members have stood shoulder to shoulder with the other trade unions."

## Shetland: Support for strike was 'complete'



Strikers plus a host of young helpers outside Lerwick's Toll Clock Shopping Centre raising public awareness.

The *Shetland News* newspaper reported that the Shetland Islands Council confirmed that 'everyone who could go on strike did go on strike' as members came out to a person to back the action.

UNISON Branch Chair Brian Smith said, "This reflects the strength of feeling about this pay offer in Shetland, and shows the need for the

employers to get back around the table and think again."

An estimated 1,200 union members from UNISON, GMB and Unite backed the action.

A joint statement from the three unions said, "The message our members are sending their bosses is 'enough is enough', we deserve a fair pay award."

## Inverurie rally told dispute can be won

**This dispute can be won.** "The outcome is in our hands, we must keep up the pressure for fair pay for our members", UNISON Scottish Organiser John Keggie told the rally in Inverurie which got wide television and press coverage.

Bob Revie, Branch Secretary and also one of the pay negotiators, added, "Perhaps now the employers have seen the strength of our members' feelings across the three unions and across Scotland, they will change their mind".



Inverurie pickets show the small amount of groceries a low paid member could afford to buy with the pay offer after three years. "It comes to less than £10 and inflation would wipe that out", said Branch Chair Kate Ramsden (second left)

**West Lothian:** UNISON's Mike Kelly is joined by Dave Prentis and ex UNISON official Jim Devine MP.

The media were out in force and Dave's major interview of the day was done by BBC on the picket.



# Overseas Nurses Network chalks up two more plusses

by Chris Bartter  
Communications Officer

**UNISON** Scotland's pioneering Overseas Nurses Network (ONN) has been recognised by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) as a positive influence in assisting overseas workers with integration and resolving problems.

In a report on immigration and social cohesion published recently, the body commended the role of bodies like the ONN and the potential of trade unions to enhance social cohesion.

Sofi Taylor, from UNISON's NEC and the founder of the ONN, said "While we know there are many things that trade unions can do better in dealing with migrant workers, it is encouraging to know that UNISON's initiative is a step in the right direction.

"Hopefully, things like our Migrant Workers Charter - launched in the Scottish Parliament last month will take us further along this road."

The Charter was launched at a meeting in the Scottish parliament hosted by Marlyn Glen MSP, and is part of a UNISON-wide campaign to avoid exploitation of this vulnerable group of workers

Around 40 migrant workers



Ruth Grove-White, Migrant Workers Network, explains some problems to MSPs at the Migrant Workers meeting.

from Kenya to the Philippines were there to speak to MSPs and explain the problems they face when coming to Scotland to work.

The meeting was organised by UNISON, the STUC and the Migrant Rights Network. Present were Sofi Taylor (UNISON National Executive), Mary Senior (Asst Gen Sec STUC) and Ruth Grove-White (Migrant Rights Network).

Dave Watson (UNISON's Scottish organiser) said, "The Scottish Government and the wider public sector can lead the way in providing a positive image of Scotland for migrant workers, by using their powers as employers and procurers of goods and services to promote

best practice."

The Migrant Workers Charter commits employers to sign up to treat migrant workers fairly - offering them the same pay and conditions as indigenous workers, committing to assist with proper travel and housing needs without exploitation, and assisting workers to overcome language and cultural difficulties.

It is on our website at [www.unison-scotland.org.uk/activists/migrantworkerscharter.pdf](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/activists/migrantworkerscharter.pdf)

The JRF report comes shortly after the review from the Independent Asylum Commission also commended Scotland for its treatment of asylum seekers.

## De-recognition threat after East Ayrshire awards care contract to cheapest bidder

**UNISON** Scotland has launched a petition aimed at East Ayrshire Council following a move by Lifeways, a commercial care company, to derecognise the union.

The council awarded a contract for looking after adults with learning disabilities to Lifeways, after the private company undercut the existing provider - Cornerstone Community Care - a voluntary organisation with 28 years experience in the field and which was formed by concerned parents and professionals.

From 1 July the staff and care packages transferred from Cornerstone to Lifeways.

As the sole recognised union, UNISON has tried to enter into constructive dialogue with Lifeways, pointing out that the Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE) regulations protect transfer of union recognition.

Despite this from day one, Lifeways have indicated they do not intend to recognise UNISON for collective bargaining purposes.

Simon Macfarlane, UNISON Regional Officer said "We are



**"We are launching a petition calling on the council to ensure that Lifeways treats our members and the people they care for with respect."**

Simon Macfarlane

launching a petition calling on the council to ensure that Lifeways treats our members and the people they care for with respect.

"The council cannot be allowed to wash their hands of the situation, as they have been trying to do. They should be telling Lifeways in no uncertain terms that they have a duty and obligation to recognise UNISON and enter in to meaningful discussions with us.

"What particularly concerns us is what does this company have to hide that they don't want staff organised and represented by an independent trade union?"

"Since we began raising Lifeways' attitude we have been contacted by parents and carers of adults with learning disabilities who are complaining there was little or no consultation over the

awarding of this contract.

"They feel that the care needs of their relatives have been bought and sold to the lowest bidder with no consideration of their views or of the quality of service."

UNISON is also gravely concerned that the council didn't carry out an Equality Impact Assessment which is required to assess the impact of this decision on people with disabilities.

Simon said, "UNISON will fight for justice for the carers and the people they care for. It remains to be seen if East Ayrshire Council cares about this service and the people who provide it."

Lifeways was one of a number of companies who won contracts to provide care services to East Ayrshire Council this year; it is the only one who has moved to derecognise UNISON.

## SCOTTISH HEALTH AWARDS 2008

by Nicola Morris  
Organising Assistant

**The Scottish Health Awards 2008 will be held on Thursday 6th November, and will recognise and reward Scotland's most committed and caring NHS workers.**

UNISON Scotland is proud to be one of the sponsors of the awards, which give recognition to workers in the NHS in Scotland and those working in health services for the vital role they play in society.

These are people who might be in jobs that normally don't have a high profile and who generally should be recognised for their commitment to the NHS and their loyalty and devotion to their patients. People who genuinely make a difference!

UNISON Scotland is the sponsor of the Support Workers Award, which recognises the indispensable support staff without whom NHS Scotland couldn't function. In addition two of our branches (Lothian Health and Ayrshire & Arran health) club together to sponsor the Mental Health Team of the Year award



This year, as part of the celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the NHS, a special award titled "Pride of NHSScotland Award" will be presented.

Individuals can be nominated for this award by a family member, patient, or colleague. The Pride of the NHSScotland Award is meant to identify and recognise those who have a long standing commitment to the NHS in Scotland and year after year have contributed to its development.

For full information about the awards and to access the on-line nomination form visit the Scottish Health Awards 2008 website [www.scottishhealthawards.com](http://www.scottishhealthawards.com). The deadline for nominations is Monday 8th September 2008, so get those nominations in quick!

## Scottish LabourLink nominates Cathy Jamieson and Bill Butler

by Dave Watson  
Scottish LabourLink Officer

Following a hustings meeting with all the leadership candidates, UNISON LabourLink Scotland has decided to nominate Cathy Jamieson MSP for Leader and Bill Butler MSP for Deputy Leader of Labour in the Scottish Parliament.

Pat Rowland Chair of UNISON LabourLink Scotland said: "We heard a series of excellent presentations from all the candidates in this important election and were impressed by the range of ideas and the quality of all the candidates.

However, the Committee overwhelmingly believes that Cathy Jamieson and Bill Butler best reflect the key Labour values that UNISON believes the Party has to champion if Labour is to retain the support of



Cathy Jamieson and Bill Butler

working people."

Cathy Jamieson welcomed the support of UNISON, she said "I welcome this support. UNISON is a campaigning union with an active membership and I want to see that type of energy brought into the Labour Party.

"I am determined that the voice of those trade unionists who affiliate to the Labour Party will be heard. The Labour Party needs to reconnect with those whom it represents."

## The right to exist - Clydebank Resource Centre

**UNISON** members who staff Clydebank Independent Resource Centre must be rightly proud of the history outlined in Chik Collins's book 'The Right to Exist' published in May.

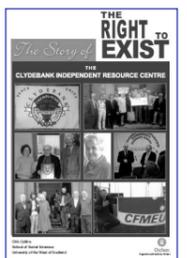
It follows the history from action group to Unemployed Workers Centre and unemployed community resource centre in 1993 up until the present day.

It includes the famous UCS work-in in 1971 when the workforce, led by Jimmy Airlie and Jimmy Reid, refused to accept government moves to close two

shipyards.

UNISON West Dunbartonshire's Tom Morrison said, "This is an outstanding campaigning group who have fought against all the odds and been such a success that they attracted interest from Oxfam and academia."

*The Right to Exist* is available from the CIRC, 627 Dumbarton Road, Dalmuir, Clydebank, G81 4ET.



## We want to hear your news

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