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'HYSTERICAL' RESPONSE TO EDINBURGH O'BRIEN INQUIRY BATTERS SOCIAL WORK MORALE

## Call to support social workers and abandon 'lust for blame'

**UNISON Scotland has issued a clarion call for an end to the witchhunts and scapegoating that have marked the fallout from the Inquiry report into the death of 11 week old Caleb Ness in Edinburgh.**

Edinburgh Branch Secretary, John Stevenson, told the City of Edinburgh Council that the kind of media witchhunt that led to the resignation of Director Les McEwan (who was not called to give evidence to the inquiry) made it less likely that social workers would be recruited to fill the vacancies across Scotland.

"Social workers across Edinburgh have felt sadness, shock, despair, anger and despondency in their heart-searching over the death of Caleb Ness," he said.

"It is in the nature of social work that we all feel responsible, no matter how close or distant we were from the events and we want to work with the council in ensuring that procedures are effective and proper support is available... but the lust for blame fuelled by the press-led campaign shows no understanding of what needs to be addressed."

The inquiry by Susan O'Brien QC followed the death of 11 week old Caleb Ness in October 2001 who was on the child protection register. His father, who had a brain injury, was convicted of killing him.

The report pointed to failings in all the agencies concerned 'at all levels' but it also stated that no single individual was to blame.

by Chris Bartter  
Communications Officer



**“If this pressure, along with staff shortages, constant vilification, and relatively poor pay, also includes media witchhunts, why would anyone want the job?”**

John Stevenson

Social Work was only singled out in eight of the 35 recommendations but it came in for the worst of the media onslaught.

The Herald newspaper and some of the broadcast media reported the tragedy with fact and balance, but the local newspaper used the inquiry to mount 'hysterical' campaigns with coupons calling for the resignation of the Social Work Director and the councillor for Social Work.

"At a time when stability was needed more than anything, we felt this whole campaign was irresponsible", added John.

UNISON points out that



**Nursery nurses make their point at the Edinburgh rally which kicked off a month of escalated action around Scotland. See page 3 for more details.**

social workers work constantly with the risk that something unpredictable and unavoidable will arise.

**"If this pressure, along with staff shortages, constant vilification and relatively poor pay, also includes media witchhunts, why would anyone want the job?", asked John**

Calling for support for staff in child protection services, John outlined examples of children social workers had saved from death or serious injury over recent years, and continued,

"Every day social workers across Edinburgh and Scotland are protecting hundreds of children.

"Not just protecting, but also working with children so they can recover, re-find their childhood and reach their potential. And doing that very often despite the lack of resources and supports available to them.

"That is not just an Edinburgh issue, it is a Scotland-wide issue and it is not enough for the Scottish Executive to make demands, to rattle out sound bites about getting tough with Councils and staff - it must finance the children's services it says it aspires to.

"...you also have to think about the morale of these

workers and at least do something to make them feel supported in the job they do for you and for Edinburgh", John told councillors.

"That requires the anger to be put to one side, the drive for scapegoats to be put on hold and real efforts made in an atmosphere of calm and considered reflection.

"To his great credit, this is echoed by CoSLA's Pat Watters in a press release. We hope councils and the Executive will listen".

UNISON Edinburgh's full submission is at [www.unison-edinburgh.org.uk/swaddress.html](http://www.unison-edinburgh.org.uk/swaddress.html)

**Inquiry concerns - Page 2**

### Police Staff win 2 year deal.

UNISON negotiators for the Scottish Police Staff have agreed an offer from the employers which will mean an above-inflation pay rise in 2003/4, and one that exceeds the final offer being recommended in England and Wales.

The two-year deal means an increase of 3.5% on all points of the scale from 1 September this year until the end of August 2004.

In the following year pay would rise by 3.3%.



Joe DiPaola

Joe Di Paola, Secretary to the Police Staffs Service Group in Scotland said:

"The negotiators felt that this was a good deal that had been arrived at after hard negotiations. They felt able to recommend this inflation plus deal to the membership, and the police staff members agreed with that recommendation at meetings up and down Scotland."

Margaret O'Neill, Chair of the UNISON negotiators, said "It was clear that this was the best deal that could be achieved in negotiation, and your negotiators felt happy to recommend it to the membership."

The recommended offer in England and Wales is for a 3.25% increase over one year.

- £1 million caution - p2
- Angus moves on Return to Learn - p2
- OT's Joint Future - p2
- Private solicitors warning - p2
- Porters back in house - p3
- NHS violence - p3
- Glasgay! birthday - p3
- Freedom of info - p4
- Safety warnings - p4
- Abu Dis wall conf - p4

## Social Work Inquiry concerns

Following the report by Susan O'Brien QC into the death of Caleb Ness in Edinburgh, two UNISON members are now on 'precautionary suspensions' and three have been temporarily moved pending an internal inquiry. UNISON is arranging special stewards training to represent members.

While the branch recognises the core issues in the inquiry report, it is now beginning to question some of the processes and conclusions.

"Unfortunately many questions are emerging about the quality of this important report.

"These range from how witnesses were questioned to serious issues about who was and was not called to give evidence, the evidence base for some of the conclusions and the justification for criticism of some individuals", said John Stevenson.

"We need to clarify a number of these issues which may be significant if members are disciplined.

"We are now examining the report again in detail and have concerns at this stage if it to be used as a benchmark for reorganising child protection."

## Caution on £11 million social work training

Stephen Smellie, Chair of UNISON Scotland's Social Work Issues Group has welcomed the Scottish Executive's £11 million boost to social work training but says it will take more than this to solve the problems.

In a letter to *Holyrood* magazine, Stephen writes:

"What the Minister needs to do is turn the clock back 10 years and massively invest in training, education, recruitment and retention from then on and once we get back to 2003 everything will be better.

"Unfortunately, time travel is not a devolved power and the Minister is unlikely to assume these powers in the near future.

"Social Work remains a challenging but rewarding service to work in.

"All staff, not just Social Workers, make significant improvements to the quality of life for the vulnerable, their carers and families, but it also continues to be a service where staff are poorly paid and regularly blamed and scapegoated when things go wrong and when demands continue to mount up.

"Addressing these issues will take more than £11 million of investment in training."

## Warning on private solicitors seeking 'equal pay' claims

A warning has come from UNISON nationally that private solicitor firms are canvassing UNISON members to seek business for possible equal pay claims.

Heather Wakefield, Secretary of the National Local Government Group said:

"It is not in members interests to instruct a private solicitor to take a claim against their employer. These firms take these cases for one reason - to make a substantial profit. They take a substantial percentage of successful claims - around 25% + VAT.

"UNISON can provide lawyers and equal pay experts to deal with strategic claims - and do so absolutely free to members. We are also in a better position to know the background to the position in the local employer and to be able to link negotiations to legal cases and campaigns."

Activists are urged to publicise this information amongst members who may be approached, and to identify potential equal pay claims to their appropriate regional officer.

# Angus moves ahead on Return to Learn

by Alan Cowan  
Angus Council Branch

**Many of our members have been concerned about the need to raise training and development as a bargaining issue.**

It is a concern which we share in Angus and have responded to by taking advantage of opportunities to lobby the employer and raise awareness.

One of these opportunities has been the Return to Learn programme. Return to Learn in Angus began in 1999 and was delivered across council departments.

Since then we have organised two courses a year through the WEA and UNISON.

We have also been able to develop a successful partner-

ship with the Social Work Department through the funds made available by the Scottish Executive for health and social care staff.

With the ongoing requirement for more staff to attain SVQs, this presents employers with a problem in how to encourage staff with little or no qualifications to gain skills and confidence.

Return to Learn offers UNISON a positive role addressing learning needs in a supportive manner and a seat at the bargaining table for local branches.

We are confident that the results we have seen locally have been valued by the students on the course and are hopeful that we will be able to encourage the social work department to commit to take

responsibility for funding the Return to Learn programme into its employee development planning.

Angus is among a range of Local Authorities supporting the Return to Learn programme.

We are unique in terms of our successes in delivering the course in a rural setting.

This has been largely due to partnership working developed through briefing managers and staff to minimise barriers presented by working in remote locations and covering absences to attend courses.

There are other groups of workers who would benefit from access to Return to Learn. These include housing staff and classroom assistants.

With minor changes to the content and focus of the

course we can offer learning opportunities across many departments. This will help our members to gain recognition for the skills they already have and support to bring new learning to the work place.

The successes of Return to Learn demonstrates the benefits to the employer of working with UNISON and that investing in staff increases the skills of the organisation.

In Angus we are recruiting lifelong learning advisors to take advantage of the progress made on Return to Learn.

The new rights on negotiation and representation on learning issues offer an opportunity to progress onto the wider picture and promote joint working on learning between the union and employer.

## OT's get conditions choice in joint future

by Kirsten Hey  
City of Edinburgh Branch

**As Joint Future progresses, more joint NHS / Social Work/Housing teams are being set up to deliver services.**

While we hope this leads to improved services for clients, it has created problems where Occupational Therapists working in the same team are employed by an NHS Trust and a Local Authority (LA), doing the same job but on very different terms and conditions.

OTs are the only health/social care profession employed in the NHS, Social Work, Education, Housing, and the Voluntary Sector, often on very different terms and conditions.

As Edinburgh began to set up and restructure its jointly funded and managed Rapid Response and Rehabilitation (RRR) teams, composed of physiotherapists, rehab assistants and OTs, the OT issue became a major problem.

Physios were obviously going to remain in the NHS, and we agreed that the rehab assistants would be employed as SW Community Care Assistants as this was a better pay scale than NHS therapy assistants. But this still left the problem of NHS or LA for the OTs.

The working group decided that insisting that the posts had to be held within the NHS or the

**“We feel we have achieved a satisfactory temporary solution for Edinburgh, and we hope other branches facing the same issues will find this useful.”**



LA would restrict the pool of applicants; many experienced OTs with long continuous service might not want to apply for the posts if they would have to change employer.

This is exacerbated because NHS Trusts can recognise LA service but LAs will not recognise NHS service, for purposes of annual leave etc.

It became clear that the grading structures and responsibilities linked to each grade within the NHS and SW are so different that it was impossible to begin to compare them, and the only useful point of comparison was salary.

We were clear that the OT posts within these teams, from an NHS point of view, would be Senior II and Senior I, but the Social Work grading structure only allowed one "clinical grade" - main grade.

We got agreement from the Social Work Department that the "senior practitioner" grade, previously only available in some Social Worker posts, would be expanded and made available to OTs in the RRR teams.

This meant that if the OTs employed were NHS, they would be on Senior II or Senior I grades, and SW OTs would be on main grade or senior practitioner.

The salaries for Senior II/main grade and Senior I/senior practitioner are not identical but they are comparable, although other terms and conditions remain quite different.

Personnel said they would insist that any OT appointed to these posts would have to remain in the employment, and on the terms and conditions, of her current employer, ie if an NHS OT applied for a RRR job, she would have to remain within the NHS and vice versa.

The stewards felt this was unreasonably restrictive - how can an employer refuse to let you leave? - and that it would restrict the pool of applicants.

Stewards felt strongly that the fairest and simplest way to do it would be to allow the OTs, when appointed, to choose whether they wanted to be employed in the NHS or the LA. Personnel were not happy with this, but thank-

ly the Joint Future Implementation Manager has a modicum of common sense and this solution was agreed.

Allowing OTs in these teams to choose who they want to be employed by will ensure that they can choose the terms and conditions most favourable to their own circumstances, thus reducing the need for equal pay claims.

It allows OTs a degree of control over their careers which should help to minimise any potential tension caused by the differences in NHS and LA terms and conditions. OTs already have the ability to move between the NHS and LAs, and to move their pension with them, or leave it where it is.

This agreement does not provide a new level of flexibility, it merely provides the same choices available to OTs changing jobs outside the RRR teams.

It is important to note that this agreement only applies to OTs working in joint teams, and we recognise that it is a stop-gap solution until the issue can be addressed properly.

As Joint Future progresses, and more joint teams are established, the OT issues will have to be addressed at a Scottish level but we feel we have achieved a satisfactory temporary solution for Edinburgh, and we hope other branches facing the same issues will find this useful.

# Nursery nurse strikes mount as employers refuse to budge

by Chris Bartter  
Communications Officer

**A**s we went to press, nursery nurses were embarking on their fourth week of strikes as employers refuse to budge in the seven month campaign for fair pay.

Joe Di Paola, (UNISON's Scottish Organiser for local government) said:

"What CoSLA are doing is creating more and more problems for parents. They know that this is the case and yet they refuse to talk to us.

"Everyone now recognises that the recommendation that they made would be worth nothing to the vast bulk of nursery nurses, even if councils chose to implement it.

"Indeed, CoSLA's President is obviously aware that it is a poor offer, as his own council agreed to pay its nursery nurses more to get a temporary local settlement! We would ask him to insist that a deal is done in Scotland to stop this continuing escalation."

UNISON is worried that a break up of Scottish-wide pay could lead to a 'social work' style situation, with councils offering different incentives to attract nursery nurses.

They accuse CoSLA of a blinkered approach. The union will be meeting in the next two weeks to agree the tactics to con-



Over 2,000 nursery nurses and supporters from Scotland and England fill Edinburgh's Ross Bandstand for a rally on 16 September

tinue the campaign.

Carol Ball, Chair of UNISON's Scottish Nursery Nurses Working Party, said "It is a huge disappointment to nursery nurses to have to intensify their action. We know it hurts our children and their parents.

"Even at this stage we would call on the employers to re-open talks in Scotland. Nursery nurses want to get back to the job of educating and caring for children. And they want to do it across Scotland, being paid the same salary for doing the same job."

"The reality of the employers proposal is that isn't an offer at all. It is merely a recommendation that no council has to adopt.

"Even if they did it will still leave the vast majority of nursery

nurses earning less than £15,000 per year. CoSLA are now refusing to discuss the issue any further and trying to wriggle out of their responsibilities."

"Nursery nurses are currently paid on a Scottish grade, have submitted and discussed with CoSLA a Scottish claim, and deserve a Scottish settlement.

"Most of the increases in duties that nursery nurses have undertaken stem from Scottish wide directives. The employers know all this, but seem happy to provoke more action and increase the misery for children and parents."

The action has seen rallies throughout the country including a Family Day in Glasgow, a march and rally to Edinburgh's Princes Street Gardens, a lobby

of the First Minister and Parliament and a lobby of the Policy and Resources Committee of Glasgow City Council.

Margaret Ferris from UNISON's Scottish Nursery Nurses Working Party said

"CoSLA have constantly tried to avoid dealing with this at a Scottish level. It is a huge disappointment to nursery nurses to have to intensify their action. We know it hurts our children and their parents.

"But nursery nurses are clear that the job they do is the same in West Dunbartonshire as it is in South Lanarkshire or Falkirk. It is the blank refusal of the employers to discuss a Scottish-wide grade and structure for nursery nurses, that has directly led to this escalation."

## 10th Birthdays prompt closer links

This November's Glasgow! (starting November 1) marks anniversaries for both the Festival and for UNISON.

**G!**

Glasgow!  
10 YEARS  
in  
UNISON

To mark the long connections between the two, UNISON is sponsoring the main festival venue, Glasgow's Tron Theatre, and the two organisations have joined their websites ([www.glasgow!.com](http://www.glasgow!.com)) to provide a direct expression of the link.

Neil McInnes, Secretary of UNISON's Scottish Lesbian and Gay Group said

"We wanted to ensure that UNISON's anniversary and Glasgow's Birthday were both being celebrated at this year's festival. We will be putting a stall up in the Tron for the duration of the festival, and UNISON's logo is prominent in the Glasgow programme."

Among the events at the Tron which will benefit from this sponsorship, are singer, Barb Junger, theatre performer Ursula Martinez, a performance poetry group, Lips Unleashed, jazz singer Stephen Duffy and an exhibition of visual art - called 'Chesty Morgan: an emotional roller coaster' by David Oswald.

**Reminder: 10th Annual Scottish L&G Conference Saturday 8 November 2003, Edinburgh**  
[www.unison-scotland.org.uk/lesbiangay](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/lesbiangay)

## New on the web

**Response to Health Care Workers Draft Guidance** [www.unison-scotland.org.uk/response/healthcomm.html](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/response/healthcomm.html)

**New Nursery Nurse leaflet**  
[www.unison-scotland.org.uk/localgovt/nurserynurse/index.html](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/localgovt/nurserynurse/index.html)

**Agenda for Change Ready Reckoner**  
[www.unisonreadyreckoner.org.uk/](http://www.unisonreadyreckoner.org.uk/)

## Southern General porters back in house

**UNISON has welcomed South Glasgow Hospitals' decision to serve notice on private contractor Mitie Olscot and return the portering staff at the Southern General to the NHS.**

This move will see all 70 employees move onto the minimum conditions of service for NHS workers no later than 1 October 2004

The contract to supply portering services at the Southern General has been in the hands of the private sector since the early 90's.

Industrial relations hit an all time low this summer in a dispute over pay and terms and conditions which was settled at the 11th hour. During the dispute Mitie Olscot had threatened to withdraw from the contract and

claimed that it was not profitable.

UNISON Regional Organiser, Matt McLaughlin said,

"This is a great day for our members employed by Mitie Olscot. Working in partnership with managers within the Trust we have secured a positive future for a key group of staff and returned them to the NHS family.

In the coming weeks and months we'll be working with the employer to ensure that staff are employed on the same terms and conditions as every other worker in the NHS."

Members were due to go on strike on Wednesday 15 October. But by voting to accept an pay and conditions offer they have settled a year-long dispute.

The private contract is one of the last still in operation in the NHS in Scotland. As from 1 October staff

will now be entitled to

- \* a maximum of 25 days annual leave after 10 years service
- \* 4 months sick pay
- \* increased responsibility payments for charge hands

The agreement comes on the back of an earlier agreement to introduce a minimum wage of £5.18 from £4.26, ensuring the porters are paid the same as other in-house staff elsewhere in the NHS in Scotland.

This contract is one of the last operated by the private sector in the NHS in Scotland, outwith PFI hospitals. Matt McLaughlin said

"There is no place for profit in the provision of public services. I am proud of our efforts in UNISON to eradicate the two tier workforce and return services in house."

## Scottish Executive accused of complacency as nurses are stabbed, head-butted, sexually assaulted and threatened with guns

**UNISON has accused the Scottish Executive of complacency in its dealings with the health and safety of Scotland's 135,000 health service workers.**

Speaking at a Health and Safety Conference in Edinburgh, Jim Devine, UNISON's Scottish Organiser (Health) said, "Two years ago, over a relatively short period of time, there were 112 physical assaults on doctors and nurses at the Victoria Infirmary in Glasgow including one sexual assault. At the Southern General there were 166 physical assaults including one incident where a patient threatened a junior doctor with a knife.

"This year, while working in the Scottish NHS nurses have been stabbed, head-butted, sexually

assaulted and threatened with guns. During the summer in a London hospital a nurse was murdered while on duty.

"Against this background of increased violence against health service workers, one has to ask what the Scottish Executive's response has been. Sadly, the only conclusion you can reach is that it is one of complacency."

"Today there is no standard definition of physical and verbal abuse applying throughout the Scottish Health Service and as a consequence the statistics that are supplied by most Trusts are almost meaningless."

Jim is calling on the Scottish Executive to introduce UNISON's 6-point action plan which is available as a presentation at [www.unison-scotland.org.uk/nhs/violence/index.htm](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/nhs/violence/index.htm)

## Public safety still low priority but Scottish councils better

**The safety of the public and employees is being put at risk because cowboy employers feel free to get away with flouting health and safety laws across the UK.**

This is the key finding from a new report from UNISON, which found that where you live in the UK determines the level of health and safety enforcement undertaken by local authorities. In Scotland, local authorities delivered appreciably better results than many authorities down south.

*However this good result is tempered by the worse inspection record of the HSE in Scotland.*

The analysis for the report was undertaken by the Centre for Corporate Accountability (CCA), who looked in detail at local authorities who are responsible for offices, shops, warehouses, fuel and storage depots, residential care homes and premises involved in catering, leisure, cultural or consumer and other services. Scottish authorities come out well in the survey but Dave Watson, UNISON Scotland's Scottish Organiser for Policy and Information, says there is no room for complacency: "UNISON will be sending

copies of the report to all local authorities and raising it with the Scottish Parliament. We cannot let the health and safety of the public be put at risk.

"Although in Scotland the level of results were better than down south, the targets set for local authority inspections are not always met, and the levels of HSE inspections here tend to be much lower than elsewhere in the UK.

"Employers in some other parts of the UK often have no real incentive to comply with regulations because there is no chance that they will get caught".

"Many local authorities, particularly in Scotland are providing an excellent inspection service. When resourced properly they are examples of what democratically accountable public services can do. "We want to see all local authorities - and even the HSE - co-operate, communicate and support one another to raise standards. We should not be sidetracked into expensive and unnecessary reorganisation, when public service networking would be more effective."

See the full report at: [www.corporateaccountability.org/LA/Report03/Main.htm](http://www.corporateaccountability.org/LA/Report03/Main.htm)

## Freedom of Information - what plans do employers have?

**Freedom of information (FoI) legislation will come into effect in January 2005.**

This may seem a long time away, but it is time that branches started to ask public service employers how they plan to gear up for it.

Chris Bartter, UNISON's Scottish Communications Officer, said:

"The implications of this legislation are much more wide reaching than people realise. Despite the 'implementation group' that has been set up by public sector employers, the bulk of authorities have done little or no planning to cope with this."

The Act aims to do no less than to change the attitude of public authorities to one of openness and transparency.

With the exception of some exemptions (many of which were challenged by UNISON) almost all records and information held by all public authorities should be available to any member of the public on request.

Authorities have to produce a publication scheme, showing what information they intend to publish, and a draft code of practice listing other advice has just fin-



Chris Bartter

ished its consultation period (UNISON is responding and our comments will be on the web.).

Chris Bartter is urging branches to get into discussion with employers over how they intend to deliver.

"Employers need to set up systems for the recording, storing and retrieval of material. They need to decide how, where and who is going to take in requests for this information, train them and other staff on the implications of the legislation.

"These have obvious implications for resources - and needless to say the Executive refused our suggestion of extra resources to authorities."

There is another thing that branches should be raising with employers.

As we know, some public services are now provided by non-public bodies -

either private firms or the voluntary sector - these will not be covered by FoI unless they provide services under contract or are listed by Ministers under the Act as de facto public bodies.

We argued unsuccessfully that they should be automatically included, but now we should be asking employers to list any non-public bodies providing public services, drawing their attention to the strong line being taken by the Scottish Information Commissioner against confidentiality clauses in contracts and identifying bodies ourselves that may be providing services - but not

under contract - for example, Housing Associations.

"Now we need to put pressure on the Scottish Executive to deliver on promises made during the Act's Parliamentary passage," says Chris.

"The draft code is quite strong in its advice to authorities signing contracts. We need to raise this advice with authorities in discussions about PFI/PPP deals and other contracts.

"Branches should also become familiar with the terms of the Act so they can use it where appropriate if employers try to refuse information."

## March against Racism

**The Annual STUC march against racism and Fascism is scheduled for Saturday 29 November this year.**

Again rallying in Blythswood Square, it is due to leave at 11.00am.

Mary Senior, Assistant Secretary of the STUC said. "This year it is vital that we attract a large turnout. We need to tackle racism and discrimination in Scottish society, and counter attitudes created by the international situation or the media hysteria against asylum seekers."

Speaking this year at the rally (12 noon - St Andrews in the Square - near Glasgow Green) will be Sandy Boyle, this year's STUC President, Robina Qureshi of Positive Action in Housing, and speakers from Edinburgh & Lothian Race Equality Council and the Glasgow Anti Racist Alliance.

## Courses coming up

Unless otherwise stated, closing dates for courses are two weeks before the start date.

All applications must come through branch secretaries. Contact your branch for any information on courses or the Education Unit at 0870 7777 006.

See also details at [www.unison-scotland.org.uk/education/courses.html](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/education/courses.html)

**Bullying & Harassment** Aberdeen - Residential 7, 8 and 9 November

**Media Training** Glasgow - Residential 14, 15, 16 November. Applications have been slow so get yours in now. Contact Chris Bartter on 0870 7777 006.

**Lifelong Learning Advisers Course**

UNISON West Campbell St Glasgow

5th, 6th and 7th November

2nd, 3rd and 4th December

UNISON Belford Road Edinburgh

17th, 18th and 19th November

If you want information on this training please call Karen Barclay on 01224

620624 or see [www.unison-scotland.org.uk/education/lifelongad.html](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/education/lifelongad.html)

## The day The Wall came to Abu Dis, Palestine

**Scottish Friends of Palestine The Wall**

**An Open Conference**

**Saturday 8 November 1.30 to 4.30**

**The Voluntary Centre, Hope Street, Falkirk**

*(An email from a resident of Abu Dis)*

"The village of Abu Dis lies on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Since Thursday night 21 August 2003, the lives of the villagers have been turned upside down.

The Israeli army, accompanied by a big bulldozer, came into our residential area, demolished the wall of the nearby hotel and passed through into the lands of the Ayyad family inside Abu Dis.

No one would believe the crazy situation we are living! It is all very hard for a human being to comprehend. Since Thursday night, developments have been rapid. The wall, up to 8 metres high, is to be completed around our villages in one month.

Hundreds of acres of land are to be lost, houses are to be confiscated.

Around 50,000 Palestinians are to be trapped behind the wall with no hospitals,

not even an emergency room. Families are in the midst of fighting for their lands and properties, in the midst of fighting for their rights as human beings, in the midst of trying to secure safe passage for their children to reach their schools in Abu Dis, knowing the school year is to start next Monday. We are in the midst of trying to secure safe passage to reach our work places, to reach the doctors, to care for our elderly parents."

**Why Falkirk?**

Around 140CE the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius had an idea. To reinforce the occupation of Lowland Scotland, to keep the indigenous Picts at bay - build a wall. The wall, defended by 30 000 men, lasted about 25 years and, apart from remnants of the Antonine Wall now visible in Falkirk, it has gone.

The Antonine Wall was a marvel of its day, carving, as it did, its way through Central Scotland. However, it never defeated its adversaries and as an exercise in the futility of wall building to separate people, it still remains second to none.

If Antoninus Pius was alive today, he might have some advice for Ariel Sharon with regard to Israel's Apartheid Wall.

In the absence of Antoninus, Falkirk and Scotland will be offering advice to Ariel Sharon.

**Speakers:** Michael Connarty MP (member of Labour Middle East Council and the All Party Group on Palestine) Cathy Peattie MSP & Dennis Canavan MSP (members of the Cross Party Group on Palestine in the Scottish Parliament) Husam Zomlot (Palestinian General Delegation)

## We want to hear your news

Won any deals or cases for members? Any 'people' stories we could use? *SiU* is your paper, we want to hear your stories. Your *SiU* contacts are:

John Stevenson (Editor) 0131 220 5655, Chris Bartter 0870 7777 006,

**FAX PRESS RELEASES to 0141-331-1203**

E-mail: [comms@unison-edinburgh.org.uk](mailto:comms@unison-edinburgh.org.uk)