

Situations Vacant

Why not get involved!

There are currently some vacancies in the branch—our Health and Safety Officer has recently left the employment of the Council and our Equalities Officer has also changed jobs. If you would like some information on any of these posts please contact Bob Revie, Branch Secretary on 01224 620624.

Stewards are always welcome—there are current vacancies in T & I, Finance and Chief Executive within Aberdeenshire Council. One of our voluntary sector employers—Cornerstone—is also short of stewards at the moment. Training and support is available for new stewards and most activists find it an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

If you would like further information—please get in touch.

Word Search Competition

All those words you have heard used in connection with the Single Status exercise are hidden in the word search below—how many of them can you find? Send your completed word search and your name and membership number to UNISON Freepost (AB048), 7 Alford Place, Aberdeen, AB10 1ZQ by 31 October 2006 and you could win £25

U	M	I	A	E	R	G	M	R	M	O	Y	B	L
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ACCEPT, APPEAL, ASSIMILATE, AUDIT, BALLOT, CONDITIONS, CONSULTATION, DISCRIMINATION, EQUALITY, EVALUATION, FAIRNESS, FEMALE, GRADE, IMPLEMENTATION, JOB, MALE, PROPOSALS, REJECT, SALARY, SCORES, STRUCTURE, TERMS



Les Chalmers,
Welfare Officer



UNISON Welfare is our own unique registered charity. We are aware of the pressures UNISON members face on a daily basis and can provide support at times of unforeseen financial hardship or personal difficulty such as redundancy, bereavement, illness or relationship breakdown.

UNISON Welfare can offer

- Support
- Confidential advice
- Financial assistant

UNISON Welfare is exclusively for UNISON members and their dependants at times of special need. Contact your branch welfare officer;

Les Chalmers, on
01224 620624
or by email
les.chalmers@virgin.net

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The views expressed in this Newsletter
are not necessarily those of the UNISON Aberdeenshire Branch



Matters

The Newsletter for UNISON Members in Aberdeenshire

Editor: Kate Ramsden - Summer 2006

Conference Special ... Conference Special ... Conference Special ... Conference Special ...

Consensus rules ok....

Consensus and a common purpose was the theme of this year's Conference. A good thing when we have huge fights ahead of us on pensions and defending public services.

Disappointingly, this branch's motion on asylum seeker children, although prioritised, was not heard, as conference ran out of time. On a positive note, however, it was supported by the National Executive of UNISON, so will hopefully be taken forward.

There was some lively debate, mainly on the public services, pensions and international issues. However the defining point in the week was the moving and inspirational speech by Thabitha Khumalo of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. Contributions like that put so many things into perspective. We often struggle to organise in the workplace. We can face victimisation and we do support and represent members who have experienced injustice at the hands of their employers. But we face nothing like Thabitha. We don't usually face arrest, beatings or torture for being a trade unionist. If we did, would we be able to manage it with Thabitha's strength of purpose and humbling dignity? How would we stand up to the



murder and torture faced by our other trade union comrades in Colombia?

We may not face the same adversity but this week demonstrated we do have a role in supporting colleagues who do face that adversity. Significantly, we have a huge role in facilitating dialogue between Palestinian and Israeli trade unionists. We saw that at the STUC and we saw it again this Conference. (continues overleaf)

Branch battles on for equal pay

The branch has lodged grievances on behalf of more than 100 of our members to protect their right to equal pay compensation for past inequalities. The Council made offers to mainly groups of typically female manual workers who have received the compensation offer based on the fact that male manual works have in the past been in receipt of bonus.

Inez Teece, Assistant Secretary said "We have been approached by many members who feel the compensation they have been offered does not truly reflect the work they have done for the Council over the past 5 years."

"We will be continuing with claims on their behalf and may have to progress to Employment Tribunal if we cannot get answers from Aberdeenshire Council."

Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair, added "The branch recommended to our members they did not accept the compensation offer. This was because it fell far short of the full offer they could be entitled to and that by accepting this offer they signed away their rights to equality claims until single status was implemented"

UNISON Branch activists were present at all 28 of the Council's equal pay signing days to answer queries and give advice to members and non-members alike. As a result the branch has had a surge of new members.

If you think you may have an equal pay claim please get in touch with the Resource Centre (contact details on back page.)

Centre stage for Bob

Highlight for the Branch of the Local Government Conference, was the central role played by Branch Secretary Bob Revie, as Scottish Regional Delegate. Bob's fellow delegate, Eleanor Haggett of Fife Branch was unable to attend due to ill-health. As a result, Bob held the fort single handed and was up speaking on no fewer than 3 occasions over the course of the two days.



Pensions were high on the Conference agenda and Scotland's motion on the particular implications for women of the Rule of 85 won overwhelming support. "Women need to be given full and proper protection within the Local Government Pension Scheme. Life events such as childbirth, marriage, divorce and widowhood often have particular and significant pension implications for women, and these need to be taken fully into account," said Bob, in proposing the motion. Once again the conference was very England and Wales focussed, and under a new rule Scottish delegates were banned from voting on issues which were not relevant to Scotland. A number of amendments from Scotland and Scottish branches were designed to give a Scottish dimension, particularly where Scotland leads the field such as in nursery nurses pay, or where the problems are shared.

For example, Bob presented an amendment to a motion on nursery nurse pay, calling on conference to recognise the pay increases achieved by the action in Scotland, the Early Year's Review and the research evidence on the role of nursery nurses in Scotland, which UNISON commissioned.

And he told conference of the threats to Scottish jobs from the efficiency reviews which the Scottish Executive is undertaking, which mirror the worries in England and Wales.

Probably the key debate of conference was on pensions. There were two opposing motions and these can be summarised as, "let's have a strategic campaign, to include industrial action if the current negotiations and the judicial review are unsuccessful," and "let's have a ballot for industrial action now." After impassioned debates from both sides it went to a card vote and the call for an immediate ballot was lost. Your branch delegation voted for the first option, and this position was confirmed as correct for the branch by the recent pensions consultation.

For my money, the funniest contribution of the week came from Pat Morgan of Cymru Wales on a debate about ill-health assessments. He described how his Council's occupational health service never recommended ill-health retirement. "Even an application from a Mr E Pressley of Nashville, Tennessee was greeted with a suspicious mind and the letter returned to sender," he said to laughter and applause. However, the issue is a serious one, and the motion calling for better more specialist assessment and a proper appeals process was carried.

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The current conflict in the middle east only goes to show how important that is.

Conference started with a key debate on the under-funding of social care and a demand for the investment to ensure high quality and free personal care in the 21st century, provided by well trained and well rewarded staff.

The union then set out its wide-ranging agenda for defending and building world class public services.

The government has missed opportunities to implement truly radical reforms and is reverting to the failed outsourcing and privatisation of the past. General Secretary, Dave Prentis warned Labour that it could not take union support for granted and would lose the next election if kept to that agenda.

The failed policies of the 'market' are destroying the principles of our NHS. Marketisation was roundly condemned. Scotland pointed to the successes of bringing staff back 'in-house'.

But Conference recognised that none of this can be achieved acting just on our own. The pensions debate highlighted the need for unions to work together and the union also set out a strategy for more co-operation between public service unions in the future.

Single Status

As members will know Single Status is due to be implemented on 1st January 2007.

As Aberdeenshire Council moves towards the consultation phase of Single Status, negotiations have continued. Regular briefings have kept you abreast of the significant developments and the branch will keep these coming.

A lot of work is going on behind the scenes though and there have been meetings almost every week since formal negotiations restarted at the start of June. UNISON's negotiating team is Bob Revie, Emma Phillips, Inez Teece, Bill Edwards and Kate Ramsden.

"We have been looking to ensure that the final scheme will mean equal pay now and into the future for men and women," said Bob Revie, lead negotiator. "This is not just about new pay and grading structures, but is also about making sure terms and conditions are fair and don't favour one group of staff over another."

"The trade unions have been arguing for equal pay compensation for all workers in gender groups who have been underpaid compared with workers in another gender group who do jobs of equal value," added Emma Phillips, pointing out that so far only women in manual jobs have been offered compensation.

UNISON is also trying to make sure that when individual letters come out it will explain clearly to members how their job has been evaluated under the job evaluation scheme, what other changes have been taken into account to take you to the pay and grading you've been offered and if there are changes to your job, what these will be and how you will be helped to manage these.

We also want to make sure that the appeals process is fair and easy to use.

Pressure kept up on pensions

UNISON Scotland will not reinstate industrial action on pensions until further negotiations have taken place on the future of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). However, it has instructed affected Service Groups to make plans to ballot members again and for more industrial action, including strike action if needed.

Consultation

A branch consultation of all LGPS members in July showed a large majority of those of you who replied were in favour of this course of action.

Mike Kirby, UNISON's Scottish Convener, served notice on the Scottish Executive, Government and Employers that the strike action is only suspended, not called off. "Our General Secretary and our negotiators have made it clear that if negotiations break down or are making no progress on the future scheme then we will not hesitate to reinstate strike action and other forms of industrial action to pursue our aims" he said.

Meantime Tom McCabe has laid down regulations to remove the Rule of 85. UNISON Scotland will be responding formally to the consultation and will include a joint statement from the Joint Trade Unions and CoSLA.

Unfair

"This states clearly that we jointly believe that local government employees are being treated unfairly compared to other public sector workers and that there is no need to remove the Rule of 85", explained Mike Kirby. Mike added that UNISON has lodged a judicial review to challenge the Attorney General's advice that the Rule of 85 is illegal under anti-discrimination legislation.

"A successful outcome would fundamentally undermine the Government argument and will be of immense benefit to our negotiators, dramatically changing the nature of the discussions" he said.

UNISON Scotland and the branch will keep members updated on the negotiations both north and south of the border and the progress of the judicial review which is to be heard in September.

Further information can be found at www.unison.scotland.org.uk.

We also urge all members to click on the link and send an updated e-letter to your MSP calling on them to protect our pensions.



The views of a first time delegate—Jamie Wright

When I found out I was going to the conference I felt a bit apprehensive as I was the youngest (by far!) and also everyone else in the delegation had all been there before. The journey there did not take as long as I expected. Some of the delegation used the time to prepare and some were more dedicated than others!

I did not know what to expect at all as everyone I spoke to gave such a different picture of events. There were two conferences really – local government and national delegate. I was only a visitor at the national delegate conference and was just stuck up at the back trying to make some sense of the proceedings and the motions. At the local government conference where I was a delegate, sitting beside the rest of the delegation, I was able to discuss the motions as they came up and felt more part of it and able to contribute.

One speaker in particular made a lasting impression not only because of the strength of her appeal, but because of the sacrifices she makes to get her message across on behalf of the women in her country, Zimbabwe. That was Thabitha and I'm pleased that the branch is planning a ceilidh in the spring to raise money for her appeal.

Socialising with the more experienced conference delegates was a whole new experience I won't forget in a hurry. I would recommend the experience to anyone – hopefully I may get the chance to go again.

Blow for Sheltered Housing Wardens

Aberdeenshire branch is bitterly disappointed that our Sheltered Housing Wardens' claim was not upheld by the Employment Tribunal. The wardens believe they have not been paid properly for the work that they do under the National Minimum Wage Regulations and UNISON has fully supported their action.

The branch is fully supportive of the wardens' claim and has asked UNISON lawyers to study the Tribunal's finding to see if there are any grounds for appeal.