

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY



UNISON members from the North East joined trade union colleagues, faith groups, campaigning organisations and many, many more from across the UK to take part in the Make Poverty History demonstration on 2 July in Edinburgh. Organisers and police said there were 225,000 there – others put it at nearly 300,000. There were certainly lots of us – an enormous sea of white across the Meadows and the city centre.

In the Aberdeenshire UNISON sponsored bus we had children, teenagers, parents, couples and individuals, all determined to make our voices heard. This was **the** political demonstration. We came to give a clear and unambiguous message to the G8 leaders – not to see rock stars. We stood for hours in the Meadows waiting to march, fortunately, in glorious sunshine – even nature, it seemed, smiled on our cause! At the end of the day many of us from further afield had to set off for home before the trade union contingent marched off – 5 hours after the first of the continuous line set off to circle the city centre.

Nevertheless, we were all very glad to have been there, to have taken part in Scotland's biggest demonstration and to have made our voices heard. We all felt we had been part of something truly historic and we all pledged to keep up the pressure to make sure that poverty does become history!

What we wanted



G8 Response

On debt – All the G8 did was to confirm the deal set up by the G8 finance ministers to cancel the debt owed by 18 countries. While this is welcome it is a small step compared to the call to cancel 10 times more debt for many more countries to eradicate extreme poverty.

On trade justice – No date was set by the G8 to end the export subsidies which destroy livelihoods of poor countries around the world. At the World Trade Organisation they continue to force free trade on developing country markets. The challenge of trade justice remains and the governments of the G8 must urgently take steps to ensure trade benefits poor countries rather than the rich.

On aid – The increase in aid proposed by G8 is a step forward and will save lives. Campaigners can be proud of the role they have played in getting these funds pledged. However, it will still arrive 5 years too late. By 2010 we will still see the awful inequity where a child will die every 3.5 seconds just because they are poor.

HIV/AIDS – This was one of the Summit's successes. In pledging AIDS treatment to all those who need it by 2010, the G8 has started to restore hope to the 40 million people who are currently living with HIV.

For more information visit www.makepovertyhistory.org



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



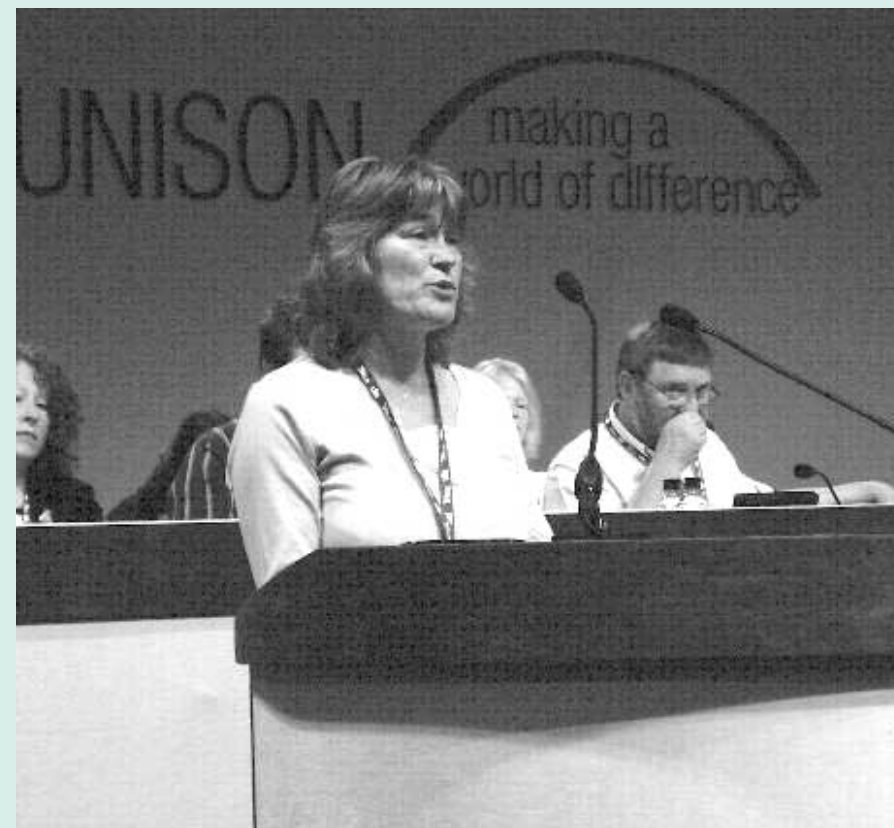
Matters

The Newsletter for UNISON Members in Aberdeenshire

Editor: Kate Ramsden - Summer 2005

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

Branch Delegates In Debate



This year's Local Government Conference saw your branch delegates playing an active role in debate.

In her first ever speech to Conference, Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair spoke of many of the problems which continue to plague front-line social work staff in Scotland and across the UK. "Staff still battle to provide a good service in the face of huge workloads, too much paperwork, staff sickness, poor management support and a culture of blame rather than accountability". She called for improvements in the pay and status of social work staff, manageable workloads and better overall funding across both the statutory and the voluntary section.

"UNISON must continue to promote the image of social work in the eyes of the public and the media and to challenge the blame culture which 'damns us if we do and damns us if we don't'".

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Bob Revie, Branch Secretary attended as one of Scotland's 2 Regional delegates. He moved the Scottish motion on 21st Century Review of Social Work which won the support of conference.

"This motion welcomes the Review", he told Conference, "but recognised that is just a start". He reminded us that social work services rely on more than just qualified social workers. The low pay in care occupations has also to be addressed.

Single Status

Bob also spoke in the debate on equal pay and single status giving a Scottish perspective to the issue. "Councils in Scotland are becoming aware of their liability under equal pay legislation" he told Conference. "However, the issue is one of funding, funding, funding – maybe if I say it 3 times the Government will understand it!" he added..

Why does it always rain on me.....

Local Government Conference began on a damp note, when a thunderstorm caused a leak in the roof of the SECC which caused a power cut. We were all "evacuated" for the second half of the morning for "health and safety" reasons, much to the amusement of many of the visiting delegates, who thought we might just be used to rain in Scotland! "They'll be saying, "Of course they've only just got electric up here,"" quipped Ian McDonald.

Hoo hah

As in previous years, much of the business was not relevant to Scotland, only this year, a new rule meant that for some motions we could take part in the debate but could not vote. This should have made things clearer, but in fact only served to confuse the issue, leading to something of a hoo hah when Scottish delegates voted when they shouldn't!

To be fair, however, where the business was relevant to Scotland, Scottish delegates were to the fore and in the pensions debate, Jean Geldart, Chair of the Service Group Executive paid tribute to UNISON members in Scotland for mobilising so quickly against the pensions threat with a much shorter lead-in time.

Review needed

It is interesting in its own way to hear of the problems in England, and to a lesser extent in Wales and Northern Ireland, around school remodelling, social work, pay and conditions and so on. Often we saw that things could be a lot worse than they are up here, and to feel good...yes, grateful even, to have, for all its shortcomings, a Scottish Parliament. However, there is a need still to review the Local Government Conference and to streamline it to make it more relevant for those of us outwith the English Authorities.

Highlights of day 1 come from Bill Edwards

The debate of the day was about the threat to our pensions. We heard that although the government backed down over implementing changes in April 2005, the legislation put before parliament has not yet been revoked. Heather Wakefield, in proposing the motion, told conference that our pensions are not up for grabs.

"The average pension of our members is only £3,800 a year," she said, comparing this to the gold standard pension scheme that MPs have voted for themselves."

She warned that further industrial action may be necessary and called on delegates to campaign locally along with other unions. "This issue has united all the public service trade unions. We must not allow this government to divide and rule."

Predictably, the motion was carried overwhelmingly, as UNISON's local government sector gave a clear message that we will act to defend our members' pension scheme. (Note: the pensions legislation has now been revoked leaving the way clear for negotiations).

"Overall, it was a fine week at conference, it had that family feel. I met loads of wonderful people who were open and friendly. We had some great meals, and one or two drinks. All in all not a bad experience."

Highlights of Monday and LG Conference come from Ian McDonald

Well, the highlight today had to be the maiden speech to conference of Kate, and Bob's double performance! (see front page.) We were particularly relieved when Kate's speech was over as she was so nervous, we'd heard of little else since we arrived in Glasgow! In the event, she did pretty well for a first go. She was succinct and to the point and was even quoted on the UNISON national website.



Bob Revie in Debate

Our boy, Bob, did his usual competent and thorough presentations, even though his preparation time was less than a 1,000,000th of Kate's!

That apart, probably the most memorable part of a day which was business like, but not terribly controversial, was the presentation from Angel Salas, General Secretary of ANTHOC, a Colombian Trade Union, who gave a very moving account of the situation for trade unionists in his country. There you run the risk not only of losing your job, but of losing your life, and Angel described how he never travels in his own country without an armed guard. He called on the UK government to cease military aid for Colombia and to direct aid to the social sector instead.

"The focus again on the issues from south of the border was a bit disappointing, and it definitely needs to get sorted out. However, the debates over the course of the week were interesting and thought-provoking in places, and I always carried a bag of wine gums with me to provide that much needed sugar rush when I was flagging!" I also ate a lot of Inez and Bill's chocolate eclairs – one of the highlights of the week for me and I did miss Naomi's Fisherman's Friends" (Ian McDonald's Conference in sweets!!)



UNISON Welfare is the charitable arm of the union. Its objectives are to relieve poverty and ease distressed circumstances for members and their immediate family. It is a unique organisation providing invaluable assistance to members who may otherwise have nowhere else to turn. Help is delivered at a local level through a Branch Welfare Officer and other members who volunteer their personal time so that the service can be provided and managed by paid officers.

We support members in a variety of ways, mainly through confidential advice and financial assistance in the form of grants. If we cannot help we can put the member in touch with other organisations who can help. Some of the things UNISON Welfare can provide:

UNISON HOLIDAY CLUB

Family holidays for families who are experiencing difficulties and have not had a holiday in 4 years.
Assistance holidays for members on low pay.
Holiday discounts on all holidays and travel with First Choice, Hosesasons, Airtours, JMC, P&O Cruises, Stena Line, COSMOS are just a few.
Our own holiday village (which has been immensely upgraded) at Croyde Bay, Devon.

MEDICAL

- ◆ Medicash Health Plan
- ◆ Funeral Care Prepayment
- ◆ Savings on spectacles and contact lenses

CONVALESCENCE SERVICE

To help members and/or their dependants who are unwell and who **are not in need of nursing care** to recuperate or rest in a supportive and caring environment appropriate to their individual needs.

DEBTLINE

Many people with debt problems do not know where to turn for help. The secrecy of debt often leads to further borrowing, making the problem worse. Debt affects relationships, work performance and health. Our FREE debt advice service offers members and their dependants quick access to a way out from the downward spiral of debt.

UNISON WELFARE DEBTLINE FREEPHONE

0800 389 3302

(open 8am – 9pm Mon-Fri and 9am– 1pm on Saturdays)
or contact Les Chalmers who will offer assistance.

**Your Welfare Officer is
Les Chalmers
Contact 07771 662952 or email
les.chalmers@virgin.net**

Competition Corner

**Win £25
by answering the
following question:**

One UNISON branch officer (no names mentioned) can eat 100 chocolates in half a minute and another (still no names mentioned) can eat half as many in twice the length of time. How many chocolates can both branch officers eat in 15 seconds?

Answers on a postcard (with your name and membership number) to;

UNISON, Freepost (AB048),
7 Alford Place,
Aberdeen,
AB10 1ZQ

to arrive not later than Monday
3 October 2005.

Join us today!

UNISON Aberdeenshire
Grampian Area
Resource Centre
7 Alford Place
Aberdeen
AB10 1YD

Tel – 01224 620624

E Mail
aberdeenshire@unison.co.uk

Competition Winners



Hugh Gordon, Banff Swimming Pool receiving his prize of a DVD player for his UNISON recruiting efforts earlier this year.

From the Spring 2005 newsletter, £25 has been won by Maureen Corley, Gordon House, Inverurie.

If you remember the question was:

The three medals in a race went to Australia, Britain and Canada. One newspaper reported that Britain won Gold and Australia won Silver. A rival paper reported that Canada won Gold and Britain won Silver. Each paper's report got one medal right and one wrong. What was the actual result?

Answer: Gold went to Canada, Silver went to Australia and Bronze went to Britain.

Congratulations to Maureen!

Single Status – Aberdeenshire Council Members

Council members have been receiving updates on Single Status from the branch.
We will continue to do this on a regular basis.



Aberdeen City Children's Panel are looking for volunteers over the age of 18, from all occupations and walks of life, with an interest in the wellbeing of children from infants to teenagers who are at risk or in trouble.

A Children's Hearing consists of 3 Panel Members, to decide what is best for the child, calling where necessary on specialist services within the community. Panel Members will be asked to serve on 2 sessions a month, with hearings held in the morning or afternoon. For Panel duties, you are entitled to time off work, out of pocket expenses and loss of earnings allowances. Full training will be provided to successful applicants.

If you would like more information about the Panel, please contact: Karen Rennie on 522723 or e-mail Karennie@aberdeencity.gov.uk or Mark Masson on 522989 or e-mail Mmasson@aberdeencity.gov.uk



Electronic Communication

The branch has agreed to set up an electronic distribution list as one of the ways we can communicate with you.

If you would like to be added to the database please send an email to

aberdeenshire@unison.co.uk

We do appreciate that not everyone has access to email and will continue to communicate with members regularly via newsletters and bulletins.



If you want to be heard
—speak in UNISON

National Delegate Conference 2005..... National Delegate Conference 2005.....



Kate Ramsden reports on highlights from the first day of Delegate Conference

Scotland's first minister, Jack McConnell kicked off this year's conference by welcoming delegates to Scotland and to Glasgow. "It's a great time to be in Scotland. There's a spring in its step - 6 years on from devolution Scotland is a land of ideas, talent and innovation," he told delegates.



Probably today's highlight, however, was the address by Dave Prentis, newly re-elected General Secretary, which was entertaining and witty as always. His criticisms of the Tories were hard-hitting – he called them intolerant, inflammatory and downright racist – and he described their election campaign as "a race to the bottom."

However, he was no more complimentary about the Labour Government, slating them for their "absence of vision" and their failure to listen. He pledged to continue the fight to oppose privatisation, to defend pensions, to defeat racism and to protect our public services.

He paid tribute to members and activists.

"Standing together, acting together, caring together, sharing together. All those human activities can be summed up in one word. That word is UNISON. That's how we live. That's how we are."

Your delegates

**Bob Revie
Bill Edwards
Inez Teece
Kate Ramsden
Ian McDonald
Mary Walker**

The debate of the day was over UNISON's agenda for engaging with a 3rd term Labour Government. Conference came alive on this issue and there was real passion in the debate. The central theme was underlined by Jane Carolan, Scotland NEC member. "We can either be seen as serious political players taking forward the interests of our members – protecting public services, defending pensions and defeating the two-tier workforce – or we can adopt a list of impossible demands," said Jane. Conference backed the motion and threw out the amendments that would have tied our hands.



Jane Carolan - NEC Member

"Overall a good start and a taster of things to come. But then, I love conference. I enjoy the debates, meeting new people and renewing old acquaintances, the social life, the weather, rain or shine, and just generally being part of something so big and so important to how UNISON operates throughout the year."

This was an especially good year for me, with making my first ever speech to such a big audience. After all my nerves beforehand, I really enjoyed it and I was on a bit of a high for the rest of the week."

Highlights from Wednesday at conference are reported on by Inez Teece

Pensions also had a high profile at National Conference and there were a range of motions debated looking at different aspects of the pensions issue. UNISON's commitment to continue and develop its campaign against the attacks on public sector pensions was overwhelmingly carried. Scotland's Jane Carolan said, "This union won a major victory, but our demand was that changes were revoked and negotiations should begin. The threat from the government is still there." She emphasised the need to take the campaign to every member and every potential member, and called for unity as the key to victory. "If there's one issue that should unite us it's this one," she said.

The surprise of the day was the keynote speech from Melissa Moye, Chief Economist from the National Bank of America, known as America's Labour Bank. What we expected to be a very dry subject turned out to be fascinating, as she spoke of the opportunities open to trade unions to take control of our pension power. "It is the fear and greed of those in power which has placed our pension funds under threat," she told us. "There is no history of corporate accountability to stakeholders in pension funds." She called on UNISON to campaign for unions to be involved on the boards of pension funds. "Ultimately we all have a tremendous challenge ahead of us to ensure that pension power is exercised in the best interests of our members. It's our money!"

Later, conference carried a motion calling for a co-ordinated trade union approach to ensuring that they can effectively influence pension fund management toward ethical and socially responsible investment.

In a moving debate on domestic violence, Catriona Grant from Edinburgh gave a moving account of her experiences, both personal and professional, on the subject, and gave recognition to the Scottish Parliament for their swift action on developing a strategy on the issue. This was one of a number of women's issues given conference support throughout the week.

"This was a day characterised by unanimity, as all the motions for debate were carried unopposed. However, it was good to see UNISON tackling such a range of different issues, from defending pensions to fighting racism and the rise of the far right, to opposing discrimination in all its forms. It didn't set the heather on fire, but it reaffirmed some old commitments and made some new ones."

Thursday's highlights are reported by Bob Revie

Thursday morning was the international morning, when we heard from our comrades from across the world. Conference gave a delegation of Iraqi trade unionists a standing ovation after hearing about the immense bravery they have shown in promoting human rights.

Hangaw Abdullah Khan from the Kurdish General Workers' Union told delegates how the Saddam regime took all the power away from the trade unions to strengthen their position in power. "The international rule has been important in helping us have our first free elections. To avoid more disasters we need a federally united parliament," he said. "We would like the British people to help restore stability in Iraqi Kurdistan and greater Iraq."

Delegates then called for international aid for the reconstruction of Iraq to be provided unconditionally and for the early withdrawal of troops by no later than the end of this year. They also committed to work with all legitimate, independent and democratic trade unions in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan.

UNISON also bestowed honorary membership on Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma's pro-democracy leader, and Nobel prize winner, to mark her 60th birthday. She remains under house arrest by the military junta who have received widespread condemnation as one of the worst violators of human rights.

The afternoon as always was taken up with rule changes. This can be one of the more tedious parts of the conference agenda for many delegates, though it is important to the smooth working of the union. However, it moved along quite swiftly this year. Most of the rule changes were non-controversial "tidying up" proposed by the National Executive, such as the one to ensure that Branch welfare officers, like our own Les Chalmers, can be on a branch committee as a matter of right. However, others created more debate, such as the proposal to allow self organised groups to put more motions to conference than regions. This was defeated. A rule which changes the name of the Lesbian and Gay group to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Group (LGBT), which failed to get a two thirds majority last year, was approved, much to the delight of those who have been campaigning for this change.

"Traditionally, of our delegation, only Kate and myself find Thursday's rules' afternoon remotely interesting and this year was no exception. It must be the way our minds work! However, it is a very important part of the business, especially when you can see the direct relevance of the rules for the Branch. Overall, I found conference week to be very enjoyable – both the business and the socialising – and the weather wasn't bad either!"

Mary Walker, first time delegate, reports on Friday's highlights

Well, on Friday there were more, and yet more debates! However, the two highlights of the day for me were both musical. The first came in the motion proposing a Remembrance Day for Slavery. A black woman delegate stood up and sang "Redemption Song" in the most beautiful voice imaginable. People stopped what they were doing in and outside the conference hall just to listen, and there were few dry eyes. Conference gave overwhelming support to the motion.

Then came a musical interlude of a very different sort, as Clytus Williams, (christened McWilliams for the day) gave his usual (I believe) virtuoso singing performance, to the tune of the Proclaimers, "And I will walk 500 miles..." Dressed in a kilt, he looked every inch the true Scotsman, but in his reply to a point of order, point blank refused to confirm it. Graciously accepting a Saltire presented by Mike Kirby, Scottish Convenor, he left the stage, his modesty intact. Again, there was scarcely a dry eye in the house, but for whole different reasons!

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to attend a UNISON Conference? Mary Walker, Cornerstone Steward and virgin delegate tells it like it is!

My first impressions of the conference were – what the hell am I doing here? I was struck dumb (for the first time in my life) trying to take everything in – so many faces, names and accents.

The diversity of the groups within the union was amazing. It's not just all about workplaces – so many different topics were debated my eyes and ears have been really opened. What I didn't realise was the huge range of problems, discriminations and exploitation the members of this union face.

I have also heard of all the support we as members give to groups, charities and friends - the good we do as union members. So yes, I really enjoyed myself and yes I was totally dumbstruck by it all but most of all I walked away proud to be a UNISON member and even more committed now to support UNISON.

So, thanks to Bob, Bill, Inez, Ian and Kate for a wonderful experience and for their patience with all the questions I asked – all the who's that, what does that mean, what does he do (I think they eventually went brain dead). I hope to come back sometime in the future but until then I will be striving to recruit, support and work for this fantastic union.

In memoriam

At this point we should probably mention that we had an addition to our delegation for part of the week. Jimmy (the) Boil had made an appearance on the inside thigh of one of our number who shall be nameless, and became quite a celebrity in his own right. He appeared several times in the Scotland in Unison conference briefings, and even got his own column in one issue, "The boil bites back." Sadly, his time with us was limited, and gradually his bubble burst, and he faded back into happy obscurity...happy at least for the one who shall be nameless. However, he had a good run!



Clytus Williams
true Scotsman or not?

