



Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year... Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year... Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year... Merry Christmas and a



Branch takes “One step ahead”

The branch led the way in Scotland, as stewards and branch officers attended the pilot of a new UK training course, “One step ahead.”

The aim of the course was to develop an action plan to improve representation, negotiation and future recruitment. It also provided a refresher for the experienced activists and further training for the newer stewards.

The course was run by Emma Phillips, regional organiser, and Betty Lyon, our new development officer. Stewards attended from Cornerstone, and the Meat Hygiene Service as well as from Aberdeenshire Council.

“I was pleased to trial this new course with the branch,” said Emma Phillips, “We had a good cross section of participants and I believe that they all got something out of it.”

“All those involved went away with a plan to address issues with their employer,” added Emma, “This included plans to arrange regular stewards meetings and for the recruitment of new stewards and activists.”

So what did those attending think?

“The course was a good motivator to get better organised. It was interesting to hear from stewards from the voluntary sector and to get a sense of their different experiences.” Lesley Ogston, steward.



“I thought some parts of the course were very good and as a less experienced steward I felt I learned quite a lot. I enjoyed the workshop format, and meeting stewards from other parts of the branch.” Linda Robertson, steward.

“I found the course was more geared to the newer activists than to the more experienced officers. It is a pilot though, so hopefully it will be changed to take all our views into account.” Bob Revie, branch secretary.

The course will now be rolled out to the rest of Scotland, and will be amended in light of the comments of the Aberdeenshire participants.

Tribunal Hearing for sheltered housing wardens

Finally, a date has been set in February 2006 for Aberdeenshire’s sheltered housing wardens’ employment tribunal. UNISON is fully supporting the wardens in their claim, and has hired a specialist QC to represent the 47 members involved.

The wardens claim they have not been paid the National Minimum Wage for all the hours that Aberdeenshire Council made them work, and that the Working Time Directive has been breached. “The sheltered housing wardens have been expected to be on call and available for ridiculously long hours,” said Emma Phillips,

regional organiser. “We believe that this time is working time and that the wardens should have been paid properly for it. It has had a major impact on their lives.”

Despite lengthy discussions with the employer over a number of years, it has not been possible to resolve the issue, and members will remember that wardens lodged claims at the Employment Tribunal in September 2004.

UNISON is disappointed that Aberdeenshire Council has not admitted their liability.

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English council employers threaten UK pensions

After the successful defence of local government pensions and positive steps to reach agreement in the Public Sector Forum, it is disappointing that members are once again faced with outrageous proposals to change the pension scheme.

The move comes from the England Employers Organisation in the Tripartite Committee established by the Deputy Prime Minister. These proposals only technically affect the pension scheme in England and Wales at this stage. However, although the Scottish employers have stated that they do not agree with some of these proposals, the Scottish Public Pensions Agency has previously indicated that changes in Scotland should substantially follow what is agreed down south.

Joe Di Paola, Scottish Organiser, Bargaining said "It is important that we revitalise the campaign we put on hold after the success earlier this year. Despite the huge solidarity from members then, the employers down south want to reintroduce the draconian changes that were revoked - and then more!"

The employers proposals include:

- **Removing the 'rule of 85'**
- **No transitional protection for existing scheme members**
- **Increasing the employees contribution by 1% on 1 April 2006 and 2007.**
- **An increase in the minimum benefit age from 50 to 55.**

UNISON and the other unions have rejected these proposals. The official reason from the employers is the cost of revoking the regulations. UNISON challenges their estimate of the cost and is pointing out that employers contributions were reduced by 1.5% this year and there is no evidence that the 'rule of 85' is discriminatory.

The LGPS is already the poor relation of public service pension schemes and to increase contributions and reduce benefits will only serve to worsen the position. Scotland's employers have also said they do not see the Rule of 85 as discriminatory, and of course there is no cost of revocation as no amendments to the Scottish scheme were made to be revoked.

Joe Di Paola, however, says this must not lead to complacency. "Whatever the employers believe, there will be huge pressure to ensure that the schemes North and South of the border are not hugely different."

"It is important that members in Scotland increase pressure on their MPs to deliver the same deal for local government staff as other public sector staff. We have produced a model letter to use to get support from their MP, and we are urging Scottish MPs to sign Early Day Motion no 787".

Since this article was written, John Prescott has announced his intention to remove the rule of 85 from the pension scheme from April 2006. This is being challenged by UNISON.

"The Local Government pension scheme is the worst off of the schemes," Christine said. "And yesterday's announcement threatens to undermine it and attack long-serving and hard-working public servants. UNISON is currently investigating a legal challenge to the changes and we will not shirk from indus-



Voluntary sector funding cuts mean services 'on the cheap'

UNISON members are angry that funding has not been given to provide pay increases in the Community and Voluntary Sector similar to those in the local authority or healthcare sector.

The union represents 6,500 workers in the Community and Voluntary Sector, and is angry that Scottish councils have cut funding to social care providers in the sector, whilst funding to private care homes increases by 10%.

Community and Voluntary Sector Regional Organiser, Matt McLaughlin said, "During this year's pay talks community and voluntary sector providers across the board have told us that local councils have either cut budgets or expect them to deliver more services for the same money. One council has apparently told a provider that they should deliver 4% more care for no more money."

Commenting on the outcome of such actions Matt said, "Put simply it can't go on. Staff in the sector are amongst the worst paid and this year's pay round will do nothing to bring them onto a level playing field with their local authority and NHS colleagues.

"We recognise that local councils have themselves been the recipients of less than adequate grants in the last allocations, but providing services on the cheap by not funding other providers fairly is not the answer.

Matt ended by saying, "For our members in the Community and Voluntary Sector this is a real slap in the face. Despite their work and effort, if this continues they will be destined to subsidise local councils and now the private sector."

Branch news



Single status - Equal pay

As the single status saga in Aberdeenshire trundles on, the branch is calling on all women members who are due to retire, change jobs, change contracts or leave the council in the near future, and who feel they may have an equal pay claim, to get in touch with the branch office.

Once any of these things happen, then you will only have 6 months in which to lodge an equal pay claim.

Single status was meant to deal with this situation and ensure that women doing work of equal value to men get paid the same, including back pay.



Unfortunately, the council is still refusing to provide the Trade Union side with the information needed to properly represent members. Until this happens the council can't begin to sort out the equal pay issues through single status.

"If we can't get out of this impasse, we may well need to begin taking equal pay cases to tribunal. That's why we're asking our women members to come forward now," said Inez Teece who represents UNISON on the negotiating team.

Negotiations on a national solution to the equal pay issue are due to finish soon. However, it is likely that, though guidance may be issued, equal pay negotiations will have to take place locally.

WATCH THIS SPACE!

New job for Inez

The branch is saying a temporary farewell to Inez Teece, our assistant secretary, service conditions, and branch development officer.

Inez has been seconded by the council to the UNISON Scotland full-time post of Lifelong Learning Fieldworker for the North of Scotland.

"I am very pleased to be offered this post," said Inez, "and I am looking forward to the new challenge. However, I have enjoyed my time in the branch, and will miss it."

Luckily Inez isn't going too far away. She will still be based in the UNISON resource centre in Aberdeen, and our branch will be one of the ones she will work with.

However, she will also be working with branches as far apart as Orkney and Dundee.



So it promises to be a busy 9 months for her!

An international perspective

John Mair, Branch International Officer, reports on the National Seminar for International Officers, held in September.

"This was a memorable experience for me. The two day Seminar focused on countries which had displayed poor and often dictatorial attitudes to their poorer paid workers—countries like Columbia and Sub-Saharan Countries were frequently highlighted.

In many cases, individuals working as trade unionists were in real life threatening situations. I am glad to report that no towns within Aberdeenshire's boundaries were mentioned.

The troubles in Palestine were brought home by one of the guest speakers and the case of poorly paid migrant workers and the racial abuse they face was excellently portrayed by a Senior TUC Official, herself a migrant worker from Malaysia. The associated workshops were an excellent platform to provide enthusiasm and innovative ideas on how WE the members can be involved in providing support and solidarity to people less fortunate than ourselves.

We started on the Sunday morning to hear of the devastation that had taken place with the earthquakes in the KASHMIR Region of India. The delegate from Perth and Kinross Council was greatly upset as his wife and daughters were living in this area. His motion to have a small silence in recognition of this tragedy

strongly effected the whole audience.

Since then, we have learned that the delegate's family are safe and well but that many friends were lost in the tragedy. The branch has donated £500 to the relief fund, and sent a letter of support to our colleague."

YOUR VIEWS

So, more about what we can do in the big World ...

Historically our branch has displayed little acknowledgement of the outside world. I believe the time is ripe to venture out under the banner of assistance to those countries who need our support.

With this in mind, I would like to consult with branch members about the areas you would like to see the branch offer support.

For example, do you already have links with a developing country and would like UNISON's support for a particular project?

Do you know people who live or work in such a country who would welcome our involvement?

We would consider any project, educational, industrial, links with trade unions, social etc.

Please let us have your views by contacting the UNISON Resource Centre (details overleaf).

Pay claim submitted

UNISON, along with our sister unions, has submitted the pay claim for the next 2 years. The claim is straightforward and realistic and seeks:

- **The settlement should run for a period of two years with effect from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2008**
- **An increase that includes either a percentage and/or a fixed sum (for example £1,000 or 5% whichever is the greater), or a combination of both, applicable to all spinal column points.**
- **A revision of the bottom spinal column points.**

The claim reflects the overwhelming views of branch members who took part in the consultation on pay a few months ago. It seeks to address the problems of a large number of low paid employees in local government. If agreed, it will also go some way to restoring and maintaining the living standards of all employees covered by the claim, who, over past years, have seen their pay considerably eroded compared to both the private sector, and others in the public sector. We now await a response from the employers.



First time delegates.

Branch members Lesley Ogston and Maureen Grady will attend the National Women's Conference in February next year as delegates of the branch.

"This is the first time either of us have attended a big national conference," said Lesley, "We are really looking forward to it and will bring back a report to the branch."

Retired members

If you are due to retire from your employment why not join the retired members of UNISON.

Ask for details at the Resource Centre, details below.

Join us today!

UNISON Aberdeenshire
Grampian Area Resource
Centre
7 Alford Place
Aberdeen
AB10 1YD
Tel - 01224 620624

E Mail
aberdeenshire@unison.co.uk

Branch officers to attend STUC

Bob Revie, Branch Secretary, and Kate Ramsden, Branch Chair are to attend next year's STUC conference in Perth, as delegates of UNISON Scotland.



Bob is a veteran delegate, however, this will be



Kate's first experience of the STUC.

What am I?

Never old, sometimes new
Never sad, sometimes blue
Never empty, sometimes full
Never pushes, always full

Answers on a postcard with your name and membership number to UNISON Freepost (AB048), 7 Alford Place, Aberdeen, AB10 1ZQ by 20 February 2006 to win £25

£25 has gone to homecarer Elizabeth Chrzanowski as winner of the competition in the previous edition of UNISON Matters

Long term sick? What you need to know Les Chalmers, Welfare Officer

It has become apparent in the last few months that many members do not know what to do, for finances especially, when they go on half pay after 6 months sick, or no wages after 1 year's absence.

IF YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE GOING TO BE OFF SICK OVER 6 MONTHS

You must register with your local Jobcentreplus, who will make sure that you receive the correct allowances. Contact your local housing office for details of rent reductions and reductions in the Community Charge. Make sure that any medical policies are in force so that you can get help from them ie credit card insurance, mortgage insurance etc. **DO NOT LEAVE ANYTHING OUTSTANDING TILL THE LAST MINUTE.**

IF YOU ARE OFF SICK FOR A YEAR

You must register with Jobcentreplus AGAIN as the allowances you were getting after 6 months change drastically. **DO NOT LEAVE THIS TILL THE LAST DAY.**

If you have any problems with anything (filling in forms etc. contact your welfare officer: Les Chalmers on 07771 662952 or les.chalmers@virgin.net

Should you wish to apply for financial/welfare help through UNISON please contact Les and he will make arrangements to fill in the application form. Don't leave debt problems to the stage that you can't pay them.

**REMINDER:
SPENDING USING CREDIT CARDS ETC.— IT'S THE BUSY TIME OF YEAR. AT CHRISTMAS TIME AND NEW YEAR MORE PEOPLE GET INTO SERIOUS DEBT. SPEND SENSIBLY AND REMEMBER THE BILLS COME EARLY IN THE NEW YEAR.**