

Pensions dispute

On November 30, 2 million public sector workers from 23 different unions went out on strike in defence of their pensions, the biggest day of action in 30 years.

Across the London and Eastern Region Unite members flew red flags at picket lines, demonstrations and rallies making their message clear to the government – **enough is enough; we will not pay for the banker's crisis.**

The Day of Action received huge support from all over the UK, with over 1,000 local demonstrations happening in towns and cities. In our region 50,000 marched in London, and many more in Cambridge, Luton, Chelmsford, Peterborough, Norwich and Ipswich – greeted by applause from bystanders. Hardly a 'damp squib', as David Cameron felt compelled to describe the day.

The overwhelming support for the strike has shown the government that public sector workers are not prepared to pay more, get less and work longer. The Coalition's plans are an attack on the very idea that any of us should have a decent pension and with it, dignity in retirement. Arguments that public sector pensions are 'gold-plated' are patently untrue. In fact, the average public sector pension is just £5,600 a year, and even less for women. Despite claims that we are 'all in it together', the pension reforms will hit women and the lowest paid first – yet again putting the deficit burden on those least able to carry it.

November 30 will go down as the day when the trade union movement and British working people renewed their commitment to defend decent pay and pensions, and to fight



to protect our welfare state. However it doesn't end here. 2012 will see us continuing to support our members in action to protect their pensions, whether in the public or private sector.

Peter Kavanagh, Regional Secretary

“ For many of the members including myself it was the first time we took industrial action in our working life. It was absolutely brilliant. We had great support from the public and our colleagues from other organisations including from bus depot, airport and ambulance services, which we really appreciate. ”

**Banso Loi, NHS Worker,
Ealing Hospital**

From the editor...

Hi, I'm Mel Whitter, the Women & Equalities Organiser for the London and Eastern Region of Unite.

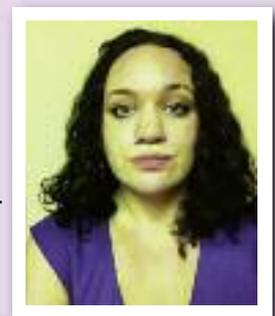
My job includes working with workplace reps and Officers across the region promoting equality in the work of Unite. I also work with the Equality Committees in the region to help them turn our policies into actions in workplaces and throughout the union.

If you're interested in the work we do around equality and want to find out more or get involved, then get in touch.

The union has the following campaigns that we are always looking for members to get more involved in.

- Women's Campaign
- Black & Ethnic Minority Campaign
- Disabled Members campaign
- Young Members Campaign
- LGBT Campaign

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Equality Courses in the region

Designed to give reps the confidence and knowledge to address equality and diversity issues, the course provides a comprehensive overview of equality in the workplace.

DATE	VENUE
13-17 Feb	Woodberry
12-16 Mar	Dagenham
28 May - 01 Jun	Heathrow
25-29 Jun	Norwich
02-06 Jul	Woodberry
16-20 Jul	Chelmsford
23-27 Jul	Cambridge
01-05 Oct	Woodberry
22-26 Oct	Luton
05-09 Nov	Woodberry
12-16 Nov	Peterborough

To register for the course contact George Foulkes L&E Education Organiser on 0208 826 2016 or george.foulkes@unitetheunoin.org

PROUD TO BE UNION

July 7 2012 sees world Pride come to London. LGBT Members of Unite will be attending the event to represent the union and continue our successful "have your say campaign". If you're an LGBT member of Unite and would like to help us out at Pride events this summer we will be at London, Norwich & Black Pride, Get in touch.

Ken Livingstone: I will establish an Equal Pay Commissioner for London



Ken Livingstone recently set out his commitment to tackle the scandal of unequal pay in London, with the promise to establish an Equal Pay Commissioner for London if elected next May.

Speaking at the Fem11 Conference in central London, Ken set out his plans for the new Commissioner role, who will be responsible for leading the campaign to close the gender pay gap in the capital.

This will include:

- Any firm winning a contract from the GLA Group will have to meet the conditions for Equal Pay set out by the Commissioner.
- The Equal Pay Commissioner will establish an index of the pay gap in the largest firms and monitor the trends in pay. They will champion any firm or organisation where the pay gap is closing, and work with others who need support and advice on closing it.
- The Commissioner will also work on issues such as representation of women in every level of the workplace; flexible working; in-work training; and equal pension rights.

There are widespread fears that the pay gap is set to grow in London next year – meanwhile women have borne the brunt of government cuts, being hit hardest by public sector job losses, cuts to childcare support, and the change to the pension age.

Ken Livingstone said:

"For too long London has been too unequal a city. I am committed to tackling the scandal of unequal pay in the capital, which has increased under the impact of the recession and Tory policies at national and mayoral level. The pay gap affects both ends of the pay scale, with women increasingly forced into part-time work and out of public sector jobs, services and retailing.

Today, I am pledging to establish an Equal Pay Commissioner for women in London if elected next year. My Equal Pay Commissioner will be a champion for London women's pay. I am determined to do what I can to prevent women being the main casualties of the current crisis and to ensure that talents of all Londoners are rewarded fairly. I will stand up for London's women and will always put their interests first."

To make Ken's Equal Pay pledge a reality, join the Unite4Ken campaign. We are running phone banks every Thursday at Unite House, Holborn, London from 6-8pm. But we need members from across the region to help. Unite district offices including Luton & Heathrow are also running phone banks from now until May. Contact Mel Whitter for more info on the Heathrow phone bank and Regional Officer Richard Gates for more information on the Luton phone bank.

Also visit www.unite4ken.com



Unite's Young Members Solidarity Sleepover at Occupy London

November 14, 2011

As the anti-capitalist occupations of public spaces grow in number across the world, Unite decided to put its sleeping bag where its mouth is and do a 'Solidarity Sleepover' at Occupy Finsbury Square, the sister site of St Pauls.

The organisation at the camp is impressive – after some Twitter contact, the daily General Assembly meeting decided Unite could stay, and we could sleep in their yurt, which is also the "Tent University".

Joined by some of our young members we arrived last Thursday evening bearing donations for the Occupy camp, including duvets, sleeping bags, cable ties, milk, coffee, sugar and cheese. We were guided to our accommodation by 'Housing' and then taken to the Occupy Kitchen for dinner, prepared by the camp chefs. The kitchen set up is sophisticated and food is regularly donated by people, organisations and businesses that are sympathetic to their cause. Apparently we had just missed an 'amazing' mushroom stroganoff, prepared by a supporter who turned up unannounced and had never even visited the camp before.

The evening was spent chatting to some of the 80-odd occupiers in the (relative!) warmth of the

camp kitchen. The people at the occupation are a mixed bunch, including the young unemployed, students, the homeless, artists, a lab worker, a chef, a psychotherapist and a rail worker. There were a variety of political viewpoints, from more 'traditional' lefties to anarchists, but all were united in the view that our system no longer represents the 99%, and we must move towards an effective democratic system rather than one geared towards helping the rich and powerful elite.

Democracy rules at the camp – every decision for the site is arrived at through consensus, achieved at their General Assembly meetings, where everyone is

given the chance to speak and everyone's points and opinions are taken in to account.

After a surprisingly comfortable night's sleep, we left the camp promising to be back again soon, pleased to have had the chance to meet and get to know some of the people who contribute to this anti-capitalist, pro-democracy movement.

With horrendous cuts being made across the country, a stagnant economy and hundreds of thousands losing their jobs, the vision and determination of the Occupiers is inspirational, and can teach the rest of the world a thing or two about what democracy and society should look like.



Unite Winning for Women in the Finance sector

Since 2008 we have noticed an increase in flexible working applications within HSBC being declined for "business need". The more concerning issue with this is that HSBC have a good flexible working policy in place that came about on the back of lengthy negotiations with union many years ago.

Following the growing number of cases from our members, we pushed the bank for the data. Analysing the statistics it came to light that over 80% of the declined applications were from women managers returning from maternity leave.

We relentlessly raised our concerns with HSBC who totally denied this practice.

Yet we were fully aware of this happening. The more shocking issue around this when speaking to our members who were declined, is that they were then put in the position of downgrading to accommodate the family needs. This had a significant impact on income/pension. Not just on reduced hours but a possible 10% reduction in salary on top, by just downgrading from managerial to clerical.

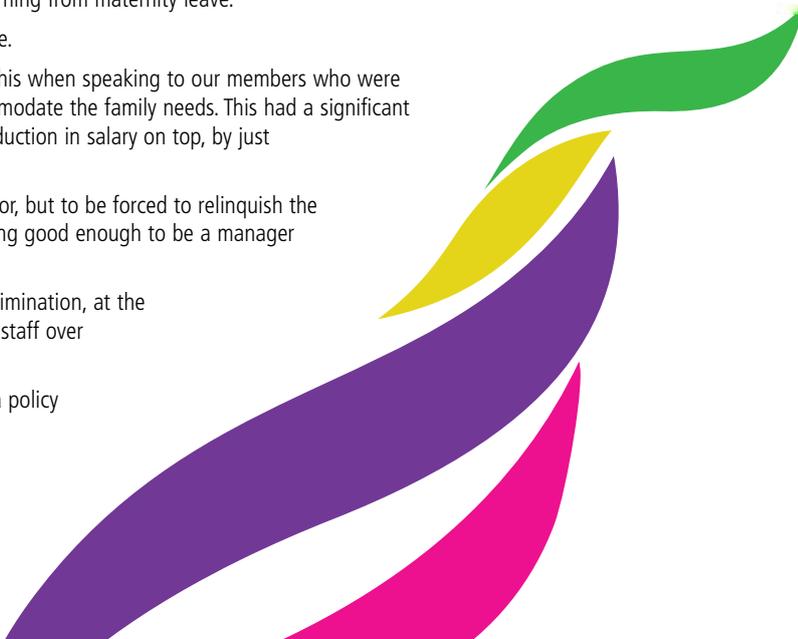
It's hard enough for women to rise above the glass ceiling in the finance sector, but to be forced to relinquish the grade making it harder to climb the ladder again with the stigma of "not being good enough to be a manager the first time around", makes it nearly impossible.

After a four year campaign by Unite against what we believed to be sex discrimination, at the end of 2011 the bank took notice and reviewed all downgraded members of staff over the last 12 months.

This has now made HSBC act positively by now guaranteeing and making it a policy that anyone returning from maternity or paternity leave on a part time basis, can now do so with no impact to grade.

We are hoping that other employers in finance and other sectors take on this positive move forward with maternity leave returners.

Diana Scott-Brown





Miserable turnout for EDL racists and fascists in Barking

The English Defence League was forced to drag in supporters from as far away as Coventry, Norwich and Weymouth to shore up a miserable turnout in the east London borough of Barking and Dagenham on Saturday 14 January.

Only around 100 EDL supporters turned up for what was billed as a regional mobilisation in Barking – although the racists and fascists had obviously mobilised from much further afield.

Contrast

In contrast, around 80 people, overwhelmingly from the local area, came to an emergency counter-protest called by UAF at just two days' notice. The antiracist and antifascist protesters included black, white and Asian people.

Ten local Labour councillors joined the counter-demo, along with trade unionists including Unite London & Eastern members. Some of the demonstrators had earlier staged a vigil for Stephen Lawrence, after two of his racist killers were finally jailed.

Boosted

The antifascist numbers were boosted by local youth and people who had gone shopping in Barking market and were horrified to find the EDL there. Many made their feelings clear by joining the antiracist protest. Market stallholders and other locals thanked the UAF protestors for being there. Barking voters kicked the fascist British National Party off the council at the 2010 elections – and the EDL, which includes many former BNP members, is just as unwelcome.

Councillor Darren Rodwell told the antifascist protest he wished the EDL would 'stop shipping themselves into Barking and Dagenham' because local people hated them for trying to divide the community.

Local people have seen the EDL's vicious racist hatred at previous demonstrations in Dagenham against a proposed mosque. UAF joint secretary Weyman Bennett said: "We have beaten BNP leader Nick Griffin in Barking and Dagenham and we will beat the racists and fascists of the EDL as well."

Unite conquering stress in the workplace

Workers' mental health is coming under increasing pressure as fears over jobs and cuts take their toll in the workplace. In this time of cuts and growing anxiety the Unite Disabled Members' Committee are working with our colleagues in the Health and Safety department and Mental Health Nurses Association to campaign against work place stress and to prevent work place discrimination for people who have a mental health condition. Unite is also campaigning against the cuts in the Health Service that support people with mental health conditions.

Unite is calling on all workplace representatives to work together to carry out the Stress at Work survey, to measure the true scale of stress and mental health problems in the workplace.

Some 70 million working days are lost due to stress or poor mental health at a cost of £8.4 billion to British business a year (CIPD). Unite needs your help to stamp out stress so that we can tackle discrimination against workers with mental health problems together.

Take action to tackle workplace stress and mental health problems. Download the resources from the Unite website or contact Mel Whitter for further information.



Web Resources

Unite equalities page
http://www.uniteunion.org/resources/equalities_2011.aspx

Equality and Human Right Commission
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

Trade Union Congress
<http://www.tuc.org.uk/equality/>

Labour Research Department
<http://www.lrd.org.uk/>

Unite in Schools

Unite in the community is an important priority for our union. Young people are often disengaged from society and they are some of the worst hit by government attacks – with record levels of youth unemployment, hikes in student fees and the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance. Along with the slashing of youth services around the country, many young people are bearing the brunt of the cuts agenda.

Unite recognises that young people often have little or no knowledge of trade unions. Reports show that even when at work, they invariably believe that there is no redress when they are treated badly.

By speaking directly to young people at school, we have an opportunity to show them that by collective action, trade unions can empower workers to improve their working lives. Reaching out to young people at secondary school is particularly important as this is a time when we can influence their view on trade unions before they enter the world of work and when they are undertaking work experience.

We are looking for members to become "Unite in Schools" Representatives. You will be fully trained and accredited by the union to deliver our Unite in Schools programme to secondary school children. If you think you have a good rapport with young people and want to help take the message of trade unionism into schools around the London & Eastern Region contact Regional Schools Co-ordinator Mel Whitter for more information.

2012 Dates for your Diary

27 Jan	Holocaust Memorial Day
February	LGBT History Month
24 Feb	Work your proper hours day
1-3 March	Unite Equalities conferences
8 March	International Women's Day
21 March	International day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
28 April	International Workers Memorial Day
1 May	International Workers Day
17 May	International Day Against Homophobia IDAHO
18-24 June	International Carers Week
7 July	World Pride, London
13-15 July	Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival
14-15 July	Durham Miners Gala
22-27 July	Unite Women's Week
12 Aug	International Youth Day
September	Women Chain Makers 1910
4 Sept	Burston Strike School
October	Black History Month
1 October	UK Older people day
7 October	World Day for decent Work
29 October	World Psoriasis day
7 November	Equal Pay Day
14-18 Nov	Anti-bullying Week
20 Nov	International Transgender Day of remembrance
25 Nov	Say no to Violence against women day
December	Disability History Month
1 Dec	Worlds AIDS Day
3 Dec	International Day of Disabled People
3 Dec	Carers Rights Day
10 Dec	Human Rights Day

The Unite equalities Calendar 2012 is available now, contact Mel Whitter for a copy.