



MORE PEOPLE ARE JOINING: Over 130 people have joined Camden UNISON between January and March 2014 - the highest rate of recruitment since 2011. With a national pay ballot looming we need to increase membership as much as possible. Numbers matter. Ask people to join. **Recruit a friend!**

Newsletter of the Camden Unison Branch

CAMDEN EYE

www.camdenunison.org.uk

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We need a massive yes vote for action

On 20 March the local government employers finally responded to the unions' (UNISON, GMB and UNITE) £1.20 an hour flat rate claim with an insulting 1% offer. Roughly 70,000 workers on annual salaries under £14,000 would receive a rise slightly above inflation in order to keep the lowest rates of pay ahead of the National Minimum Wage due to increase by 3% to £6.50 an

hour from this October. For 90% of the overall local government workforce and all council workers in Camden and most of Greater London the offer is just 1% while inflation is running at 2.8% (Retail Price Index). Over the past five years the real value of wages for a local government employee on national (NJC) pay scales and at the top of their grade has plunged 18%. In the past year the branch's welfare

fund has received several applications from desperate members employed by Camden Council on Scale 6 and below. They have been seeking to stave off disconnection of gas or electricity or been faced with the prospect of eviction for rent arrears. Pay restraint has done nothing to save local government jobs: in Camden 950 posts have been axed, nationally more than 450,000 jobs have

gone. Clearly the current Tory-led coalition intends to condemn public services such as local government to indefinite austerity. In contrast bankers have gorged on a spread of bonuses worth an estimated £80 billion since 2010. All three NJC trade unions agreed unanimously at the end of February to move to a consultative ballot if the employers' side proposed no more than 1%. So following

the 20 March meeting UNISON is launching a consultative ballot from early April across all its local government branches covered by the NJC. UNISON represents over half a million council employees. With the unanimous backing of the branch's Annual General Meeting, Camden UNISON alongside our union's national leadership is strongly urging members to vote to reject this miserly offer and support a move to national strike action. In order to be lawful any strike or other form of industrial action would require a further postal ballot to members' home addresses, with the process overseen by Electoral Reform Services. Strike action does involve sacrifice, but short-term pain is unavoidable if we are to turn the tide. The alternative is not just a further fall in real pay, but more members slipping into poverty, more public service cuts and still more grotesque inequality in society as a whole.

Photo: Phill Lewis



The branch Annual General meeting on 6 March voted to campaign for a 'yes' vote if there is a national strike ballot and ensure a high turnout in the indicative ballot after hearing John McLoughlin, a member of UNISON's Local Government Service Group speak on the pay claim. A SOAS cleaner spoke on their strike action to achieve parity with in-house staff. A collection raised £180.

THE UNISON NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE took place on 13-15 February 2014 at the Brighton Centre. Camden delegate **Fiona Darmady** was impressed. The venue was full of delegates from the length and breadth of Britain; (including one of her neighbours from the Orkney Islands!). Discussions covered a wide range of topics from the benefit cap, austerity, zero hours contracts, child care, the housing crisis, discrimination, violence against women, food banks and save the NHS to 'lose the lads mags' campaign

Women united

Everything went seamlessly; motion after motion was put forward and every time I turned my head to see the outcome, I witnessed a sea of hands in favour of the motion going ahead! The only point that was debated at length was the cervical screening age of women. It was an extremely lively event set against the backdrop of strikes in Scotland in defence of pay for anti-social hours worked by care workers in Glasgow who were starting a 72 hour strike – (half of a bucket contribution



went towards them). There was a positive mood and despite many galling and upsetting recounting of how women had survived all manner of negative situations; hope prevailed. Humour was abundant with a LGBT delegate apologising for the

atrocious weather which she blamed on their marriages! The power of striking came up and the successes in Scotland were noted; in particular the abolition of the bedroom tax.

I found the most striking speaker was Jasvinder Sanghera, the founder of Karma Nirvana which campaigns against forced marriage and honour-based violence. Listed as one of the Guardian's 100 most Inspirational Women in the World she spoke of her own personal experience fleeing an arranged marriage.

The information on the economic situation of millions of women in the UK demonstrated that we are now worse off than in Victorian times. It was also interesting to recall what happened during the miners' strike and the role women played in support. What is abundantly clear is whether it is increasing the awareness of the plight of many (witness the drastic upsurge in the number of food banks across the UK), or facilitating the opportunities for women, that a united front is the way for-

ward. A shocking statistic was that half of our union members have or will suffer domestic abuse in their life. The other factor affecting women and children at risk is their economic status in society, further worsened by the increasing cuts and closures of services. Going to the UNISON National Women's Conference was a highly rewarding, informative and inspirational experience. The speakers were phenomenal and provided valuable information. I was moved by the sheer determination of fellow sisters. It highlighted the importance of us all sticking together. This became particularly relevant when we were returning to our accommodation. I was blown to the ground by the gales down in Brighton but fellow sisters and I then locked arms and managed to get back safe. Thank you UNISON for an educational and enjoyable time.

Fiona Darmady,
HASC

● For a full list of motions and decisions made go to <http://www.unison.org.uk> and search for 'UNISON Womens Conference 2014'.



Camden UNISON representatives were amongst the thousands to honour Bob Crow's life as the horse-drawn carriage bearing his body to his funeral on Monday 24 March passed. RMT members, other trade unionists and socialists came from around the country to pay tribute to a great fighter for his members, for political representation for working people and a socialist alternative to the crisis-ridden capitalist system. Bob Crow's union, the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union, has called a national mobilisation for the London May Day march on 1 May. A special event is also planned for May Day.

Use your vote

Members of UNISON local government branches across Britain will soon have the chance to elect a new Service Group Executive (SGE). The SGE, which is subject to election every two years, acts as the principal decision-making body between conferences on major policy issues affecting the union's members in local authorities and on outsourced council contracts across all of UNISON's geographical regions. This year's vote comes against the background of the critically important dispute over local government pay. Our branch committee has nominated Sue Plain, the secretary of the Southwark branch and chair of UNISON's London regional local government committee for the reserved women's seat, Helen Steel,

a shop steward in Haringey branch and a member of the National Joint Council committee for the reserved low-paid worker's post, and John McLoughlin, an incumbent member of the SGE and secretary of Tower Hamlets branch for the elections that open on 7 April and close on 16 May.

If you have not received a ballot paper by 14 April, please contact the UNISONdirect helpline on 0800 0857 857. The branch office is not involved in the administration of these elections.

The results of this year's elections will be announced immediately prior to UNISON's local government service group conference in mid-June.

Members are strongly urged to make use of their vote.

SOAS cleaners' inspiring strike

Outsourced cleaners at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) near Russell Square took strike action on the 4, 5, and 20 of March as part of their campaign to end discrimination and to win equivalent sick pay, holiday and pension entitlement as enjoyed by staff directly employed by the prestigious University of London college. They won enormous support from students and academic staff who refused to cross picket lines resulting in the virtual closure of the university. Messages of support have flooded in

from all over the country.

The cleaners, members of the SOAS UNISON branch, have been fighting since 2006 for an end to the inequality they suffer and won the London Living Wage and trade union recognition in 2008.

Through campaigning and organising this group of predominantly Latin American migrant workers have built a union capable of taking on their employer, the multinational company ISS.

Camden UNISON has supported the dispute throughout.



SOAS cleaners' superb pickets started at 4.00 am and continued till 4.00 pm. They were joined by families and friends, students, academics and trades unionists from other branches. A photo took pride of place on UNISON's national web site.

April 2014

CAMDEN EYE

Solidarity and leadership

One of the truths of the pension strikes in 2011 was that everyone was pleased that trade unions were on strike together. It would make a great deal of sense if the unions and sections now in dispute covering local government, Health, Higher Education, schools and London Transport took action at the same time. This is easier said than done. It will take pressure from below by branches on national leaderships to achieve it. And leadership is important. Bob Crow was admired because he led and organised. His union increased its membership and its members were amongst the best paid. Our members are angry about worsening living standards and are willing to take action. The national leadership needs to demonstrate it has a serious strategy to win the pay claim this year. Shop stewards have an important role as local representatives putting forward individual members' cases. But ultimately it is collective organisation and action which are critical to defending jobs and improving pay and conditions. This has to be strengthened.



THIRTY

Mike Jackson with the late **Mark Ashton** founded Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) in 1984. Mike spoke about LGSM at Camden Trades Council

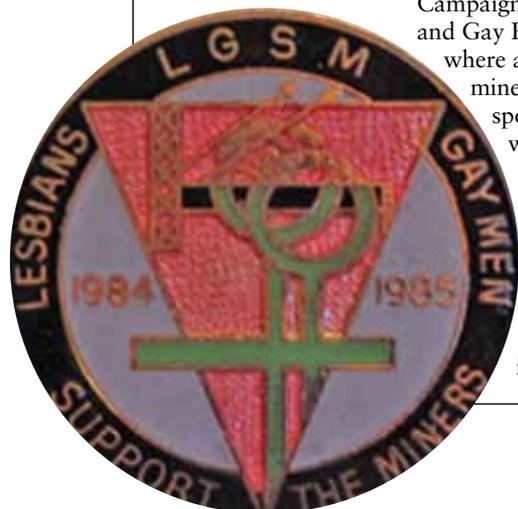
Lesbian & Gays Support the Miners

The LGBT community in the late 1970s early 1980s faced several attacks including the blasphemy trial which closed down Gay News; the Customs raid on Gay's the Word bookshop when stock was seized because of its allegedly pornographic content and the higher age of consent for gay men (21). The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was forced into action by the threatened closure of Cortonwood pit in March 1984. It proved a lengthy dispute. Mark Ashton suggested we take collecting buckets to the June 1984 Pride march. The marchers donated generously and positively. Afterwards there was a fringe meeting, organised by the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights, where a striking miner from Kent spoke and was warmly received. LGSM was born the following week when Mark called an inaugural

meeting at his flat. Eleven turned up at that first meeting. Meetings took place weekly and numbers rapidly increased. The group had a simple aim: to offer support to the striking mining communities and their union, the NUM. The choice of a mining community to twin with was fairly simple – one of the group came from near Dulais. Over £500 had been raised and it was time to donate the money. I remember writing and posting the first letter to the Neath, Dulais and Swansea Valley Miners' Support Group, curious to know what the reaction would be when it was opened. The outcome was that David (Dai) Donovan would meet us in London and we could give him the cheque then. Dai came to a gay pub in King's Cross called 'The Bell' and on the stage told the crowd that he had 'been sent by the mining communities of South Wales to extend the hand of friendship to the lesbian and gay community'. He received huge applause and thereafter the solidarity just strengthened.

There were reciprocal visits between London and South Wales, LGSM'ers staying with the miners' families in Wales and the families coming to London to stay with LGSM'ers. When we entered a crowded community hall on our first visit there was silence for a moment then someone started clapping and then everyone was clapping. LGSM kept a lively debate up within the lesbian and gay community and press. The biggest fund-raiser LGSM organised was the 'Pits and Perverts' benefit gig at the Electric Ballroom in Camden on 10 December 1984 with the Bronski Beat featuring Jimmy Somerville. Around 1,500 attended and over £5,000 was raised. Altogether LGSM collected over £22,000 and became the largest single contributor to the Dulais communities. In contrast the Gay Conservatives raised £25 for the scabs. LGSM were in Wales with the miners when the announcement to return to work was made. One of the miners at their sup-

port group meeting that weekend said that it was now time to return the support that others had given to them 'and none more so than the lesbians and gays whose support has been magnificent'. They returned that support by wearing lesbian and gay badges on their lapels, by driving their support group van emblazoned with pink triangles, by bringing their families and the Blaenant Lodge miners' banner on the Pride '85 march. Then at the TUC and Labour Party conferences in Autumn 1985 the NUM announced that it would be supporting the lesbian and gay equalities propositions. They were then carried after years of previous failure. LGSM ended not long after the end of the strike. All of its archival material was deposited with the People's History Museum. Look out in the autumn for a play called 'Pits and Perverts' and a feature film by Pathe, supported by BBC Films, called 'Pride', which is based on LGSM and the Dulais mining community.



YEARS ON

A year long lesson in solidarity: 30 years on from the Miners Strike 1984-1985

In March 1984 Margaret Thatcher took on the miners. The announcement was a single pit closure which forced strike action in response. Arthur Scargill, General Secretary of the 180,000 strong National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) argued that they planned to close down 70 pits, but was attacked by the Tories as scaremongering. Cabinet papers released this January proved him right. The Tories cast him and the miners as 'the enemy within' and the most decisive domestic confrontation of the Thatcher era began.

Camden NALGO and Camden NUPE (precursors of UNISON) were amongst the many union branches across the country that realised the political significance of the strike. Both branches quickly made the decision to 'twin' with pits in Yorkshire: Camden NALGO with Bentley – a pit village just outside Doncaster, and Camden NUPE with nearby Hatfield Main. Camden Nalgo's decision to twin with Bentley was made at a 600 strong branch meeting ad-

dressed by two women from the Bentley Women's Support Group who asked for our solidarity and support.

I was a shop steward for Camden NALGO in the Housing Needs shop, and joined the branch's Miners Support Group. We held weekly meetings, collected weekly levies from as many members as we could and sent money up to Bentley. We got agreement from the Council to have one person released from work to organise support full time.

I remember going desk to desk and money being willingly handed over. I still have the handwritten levy sheet where we would regularly collect from £20 - £30 from our shop alone. I collected the levies from the whole Housing Department and sent it up to Bentley. By the end of the strike, we had collected well over £5,000 in Housing alone. The branch total was over £35,000. In December 1984, we agreed to get pictures of all the miners' kids and each child or family was 'adopted' by someone in Camden NALGO and presents were bought. We took

these all up to Bentley just before Christmas. Even some of our members who would not put into weekly levies agreed that leaving the kids without presents at Xmas was too harsh.

During the year long strike, we had many delegations up to Bentley. I took over 10 members of our Housing Needs shop up one snowy week. We stayed with families, were fed (we did bring food parcels with us!) and entertained at the Miners' Welfare Club. Then at 4am up we got and joined hundreds of miners on their picket lines. Then at 5.30ish off we went to secondary picket the power station! However tired we were, we all went along, understanding that this was what the miners, their wives and others had to do every day – a very humbling experience. There were times during 1984 that the strike could have won. Margaret Thatcher understood that isolating the miners gave her the best chance to beat them. Throughout that year there were opportunities for the trade union movement to beat the Tories. NACODS (the

Pit Deputies who were essential to health and safety in the pits) balloted and threatened to come out on strike. Sadly they got bought off with a deal. The railway workers (NUR) were in dispute and nearly came out on strike which would have shut down the whole railway network. And the dockers (who Thatcher targeted later in the 1989) were due to come out during the summer. The leadership of the TUC and the various unions who could have backed up the miners agreed to deals rather than hold out to support the miners and

they returned to work, having lost in March 1985.

I am hugely proud of what our branch and the many activists at the time did. It left an enormous legacy. The full truth of what the Government was prepared to do to win is only now coming to light.

Look out this summer for a showing of the film: *(Still) The Enemy Within*.

Phoebe Watkins
Branch Co-chair

● The best account of the 1984-85 miners strike is *The Enemy within: The secret war against the miners* by Seamus Milne.



Secondment pay rise victory

Camden Council workers on secondments who signed the new contracts did not receive any performance related pay (PRP) rises in June 2013. After a challenge from Camden UNISON management eventually reversed their position and awarded the pay rises with backdating. When workers in their substantive posts received their pay rises last June, up to 120 workers on secondments (who on the old contracts were always treated the same as those in substantive roles) had had their acting up allowances cut by the

same amount their substantive salaries increased. In some cases by up to £80 per month, leaving their take-home pay unchanged. Apart from being unfair, and undermining the spirit which the council claimed for PRP – namely, that it was to reward good performance – we argued that workers were in fact contractually entitled to these rises and that not awarding them amounted to an unlawful deduction of wages. It also lent weight to our argument that PRP was really just intended as a crude way to cut

wages. Workers from P&M grades (old SO1 and up) acting up in higher graded P&M posts had their acting up allowance slashed, and workers whose substantive posts are on SP grades (old scale 6 and below) acting up in P&M did not receive any bonus or pay increase at all, regardless of their performance rating. Camden UNISON immediately raised the issue with senior management, and after lengthy discussions HR agreed to reverse the acting up allowance cuts for P&M workers, awarding them the full percentage pay rise for their acting up role,

and for substantive SP workers HR agreed that they would allow local management discretion to move them up an increment on the old scale points. In all cases we are aware of, local management did move members up one scale point. These were both backdated to 1 April 2013.

As it is nearly time for increments and PRP rises again, members on secondments should keep a close eye on their payslips and if you do not get the pay rise you think you are entitled to contact *John Shepherd* (020 7974 3972/John.Shepherd@camden.gov.uk).

Craft Workers get 1 per cent

Camden UNISON has ensured that craft workers will now receive their 2013 'cost of living' pay rise of 1% backdated to 1 April last year. When the majority of council workers on NJC pay and conditions were awarded the 1% cost of living pay rise for 2013, craft workers on their own set of conditions did not receive the award, which was agreed nationally between the unions and employers in July last year. After repeatedly raising the issue, management have now agreed to implement the award with full backdating, stating they did not receive the notification that agreement had been reached from the national Local Government Employers.

Sick pay success

A 68-year school cleaner, with nearly 25 years service, who is undergoing intensive cancer treatments, had a modest windfall in late January. Camden Council's cleaning and maintenance contractor, the Danish-based multinational ISS, finally agreed to pay her Occupational Sick Pay (OSP). The cleaner had originally started in the early 1990s as a Camden employee and had worked continuously for a number of private contractors

after Camden first outsourced cleaning jobs some 15 years ago. She should have retained her entitlement under the local government sick pay scheme (six months full pay for up to six months) under the protection offered by the TUPE regulations. ISS had initially claimed that there was no evidence provided by the previous contractor (MITIE) that the worker had TUPE-related protection, but Camden UNISON persisted and six

weeks later after first raising her case the branch learned that ISS accepted she did indeed have the right to full sick pay, dating back to September. When contacted by UNISON, Camden HR officers were sympathetic and tried to find evidence of the original employment relationship, but it was the member herself who had fortunately retained correspondence from her first year as a Camden employee, including her original statement of terms and conditions. She

has since received two further instalments of full pay worth roughly four times more than Statutory Sick Pay. The member concerned still has a long road to recovery, but thanks to the payment of OSP she has been able to clear several outstanding bills. This case offers a vivid illustration of the basic day-to-day challenges outsourced workers face at the same time as proving the very real value of being a UNISON member, whoever the employer might be.

Strikers visit Camden Branch

Doncaster Care UK strikers spoke about their 14 days of strike action at the Branch Committee on 24 March. Care UK is attacking anti-social hours payments and workers could lose substantially. Average pay is less than £20,000. Their Chief Executive's remuneration package is over £800,000. A collection raised £64.02 and a donation of £200 was agreed.

Caterlink get organised

Camden school kitchen workers who provide healthy meals to Camden school children have now submitted their claim for the London Living Wage of £8.80 an hour to Caterlink, their employer. Camden Council proclaims it is a London Living Wage employer, but many contractors who provide Council services, still pay less than this. Caterlink, who employ the majority of Camden's school meals staff, still employ them on £6.31 even though they have contracts in other authorities or educational workplaces where they pay the London Living Wage.

At a mass meeting of staff the motion to submit the claim was unanimously agreed. Some staff members even began to discuss what action they could take as they believe the company will just try to wash its hands of the campaign and blame Camden who pay the contract. There were many other grievances as well. Some members have complained to UNISON that the company expects them to work for an extra 5 days a year without pay. Worst still it looks as though they got docked pay if they didn't turn up on these extra days. UNISON has asked Caterlink for

an explanation and for any unpaid wages to be paid.

There are many other issues UNISON members who work for Caterlink have asked UNISON to take up. UNISON will be organising these workers to make sure their campaign for decent pay and conditions is met this year.

Some staff described their situation:

Worker A – I just work to pay bills and have to rely on my family to get me food.

Worker B – The wages are not right, I have to borrow money.

Both – The union has to campaign for the Living Wage for us because we work very hard to provide

healthy meals for the children in our school **Worker C** – on my wages I can't afford to do things with my family – even simple things like the cinema or treats for my son when he's done good work at school, I can't afford his trainers, I can't visit my family who live around London. I want to fight for the living wage as it affects our children who don't get any benefit from our work providing healthy meals for Camden's school children. They see the worst of their parents when we have money stress as well as being physically exhausted at the end of the day.

Hugo Pierre
CSF Co-convenor

Teachers fight for the future of education

After a lengthy pause teachers across England Wales again took strike action on Wednesday 26 March. Members of Britain's biggest teaching union, the NUT, stayed away from schools as part of a bitter and protracted battle with Tory Education Secretary, Michael Gove. While Gove beat a partial retreat over terms and conditions in February, there are huge, unresolved issues regarding:

- The introduction of Performance-Related Pay

- Damaging changes to the Teachers' Pension scheme, including a rise in the retirement age to 68, and

- Staggering workloads that are now leading 40% of teachers to leave the profession after less than five years on the job.

The scheduled action is only for one day, but debate around tactics and strategy in this critically important dispute is likely to dominate the upcoming NUT conference in Brighton during the Easter weekend.

Camden teachers joined a London demonstration of 11,000 on the day outside the BBC's new Broadcasting House to protest at biased media coverage and then marched to a large rally at Westminster Central Hall.



Caterlink workers on the local Camden pay protest march on 4 February

Join UNISON today

● You cannot defend your terms and conditions on your own. You need to join a union. With over 3,000 members Camden UNISON is the largest union in the council. Join online or access PDFs of application forms at: www.camdenunison.org.uk/join

If you are already a member why not ask your colleagues to join?

There's strength in numbers.

● UPDATE DETAILS
Have you moved or changed your job/workplace recently? If so please update your membership at: www.camdenunison.org.uk/update

● Visit the branch website: www.camdenunison.org.uk

● CONTACT Camden UNISON Branch Office, 59 Phoenix Road, Brill Place, London NW1 1ES Phone: 020 7974 1633 Fax: 020 7387 1599



Photo: Pete Ainsley

Over 6,000 people participated in the Stand up to Racism and Fascism London demonstration on Saturday 22 March 2014. It coincided with UN Anti-Racism Day and was part of an international day of action.

Trade union banners including Camden UNISON's were much in evidence. The demonstration was vibrant and diverse with a range of different communities and faiths joining trade unions, anti-racist, anti-fascist and social movements.

More at www.uaf.org.uk

Camden Eye

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● Want to get involved? We

need writers, cartoonists,

photographers.

● email pete.ainsley@camden.gov.uk

● Copy date next issue:

23 May 2014

● The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of Camden UNISON, but the branch will defend the right of members to express those views.

Pay cuts put pressure on welfare fund

Camden UNISON operates a modest welfare fund, which dates back to the 1970s and is currently available only to direct Council employees. The fund issues interest-free loans, not grants (in contrast to our union's national fund, 'There for You').

The past 18 or so months have put unprecedented pressure on our fund, which issued 12

emergency loans to members between the summer of 2012 and the end of 2013.

All of the loan recipients were working in jobs at Scale 6 or below, and generally working in front-line roles including caretaking. The period since July 2012 has also seen a significant shift in why members have applied to the fund with overdue utility bills and rent

arrears linked to the majority of approved applications.

Our branch committee unanimously agreed to transfer an additional £1,000 to the welfare fund in late March since reserves had fallen to just £200. For more information about the welfare fund, please contact Michael Anderson in the Culture & Environment directorate.