



'STAND UP TO RACISM AND FASCISM' – Join the national demonstration on Saturday 19 March, assemble 12 noon, Portland Place, W1A (Tube: Oxford Circus)

Newsletter of the Camden Unison Branch

CAMDEN EYE

www.camdenunison.org.uk

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Victory for Camden traffic wardens

Our members who work as civil enforcement officers (traffic wardens) for NSL are celebrating a victory following two periods of strike action in September 2015. Having taken a very hard line the company eventually made an improved offer just before a third period of strike action was due.

The settlement sees the hourly pay for CEOs rise from £8.92 to £9.40, with guarantees that for the next three years it will rise in line with increases in the London living wage. Hence from 1 April 2016, it will increase to £9.65.

Our NSL members are to be congratulated for their very solid action during which the company brought in 'scabs' from as far away as Manchester to break the strike. The company even tried to discipline one of the strikers for confronting a 'scab', who was wearing his personal identification number off duty. The threat of further action

in defence of our comrade was enough to make them back down. Camden Council supported NSL throughout the dispute.

The strikers would like to thank all branch members who supported them on the picket lines and demonstrations. Thanks also to the other trade union branches which supported their strike fund. Their action was made possible by the existence of the branch hardship fund. The strikers received basic strike pay from UNISON at only £15 per day, which isn't enough to sustain low paid workers through lengthy strike action. The branch's ability to make hardship payments really made the difference between success and failure. We need to make sure that the branch fund is sustained at its current level, so that in future disputes members can get the same level of support that was given to the NSL strikers.



Junior Doctors march 12 January

Support the Junior Doctors

Some 40,000 junior doctors, members of the British Medical Association (BMA), struck for 24 hours against new contracts on 12 January. Emergency care was provided, and future strike plans include an all-out strike on Wednesday 10 February.

The doctors are fighting plans to impose a new contract that would effectively mean having to work longer hours thus putting patient safety at risk. Many of us will be able to remember when junior doctors worked 80-100 hours a week, sometimes even longer, but safeguards were put in place in the 1990s limiting their hours. The new contract will remove these safeguards. Not only will the government's action impact these safeguards. Their decision to remove bursaries for nursing students will also affect

the ability of would-be nurses to afford the cost of training, worsening an already acute shortage of nursing staff in many parts of country, not least London, where more than 10,000 nursing posts are currently vacant. Such shortages obviously hit the quality of patient care as well as endangering safety. The government wants to increase weekend cover, giving the impression that hospitals are not staffed at the weekends. We all know, however, that if you need emergency care, then you can go to a hospital at any time of the day or night and receive free treatment. In reality, this is an attack by the Tories on the NHS.

Camden UNISON had already agreed to support the junior doctors if they took action, and so on 12 January a number of stewards visited the picket lines at the Royal Free, University College

London Hospital (UCLH) and St Pancras hospitals. Some of the doctors held a 'meet your junior doctor' leafleting session at Euston station to explain their dispute and action to as many people as possible.

They were greeted with loud hoots of support from passing vehicles, and virtually everyone stopped to wish them well. At UCLH, nurses came out in their lunch break to support the doctors. They were joined by other local trade unionists.

If the Government gets away with this contract, it will make our hospitals less safe, and it may also make it easier to privatise them, so we are asking every UNISON member to support this dispute, to visit their local hospital if further action takes place, join us on future picket lines at UCLH and other local hospitals.

Agile Working: or not so Agile Working?

Camden launched its Agile Working practices in 2013. In 2014 most Council staff moved into 5 Pancras Square (5PS). Staff were told they would have an allocated own 'home' where storage and filing will be located, but could sit anywhere within the building, with no entitlement to a specific desk. Staff were informed that they may have to work from home on a regular basis.

Some managers want staff to sit together and work in teams. However, staff can work elsewhere if they wish to. The agile working policy ethos is based on performance. However it appears that some managers are not following Camden's guidelines or the ethos with which policies and practices were intended. For example, staff report that: managers are threatening disciplinary action; making formal demands; insisting that staff sit in teams or where managers consider appropriate, and putting pressure on staff to sit at specific desks, on floor or location within the building. Agile Working guidelines state:

- flexible-location working includes hot-desking, remote working, working from community hubs and working from home arrangements;
- flexible-time working means having a varied working pattern that is not just Monday to Friday, 9 to 5.

Unison is taking this is up, asking why staff are not being allowed to sit where they wish to within the terms of the Agile Working guidelines.

Dave Prentis 'Re-elected' but cloud of scandal swirls

Incumbent UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis appeared to have won his fourth straight term of office when the result of last autumn's election for general secretary was announced on 17 December. Prentis won 49.4% of votes cast. This is the first time since 2000 that he failed to win more than half of the vote. Voter turnout plummeted to just 9.8%, down 5% from 2010.

However disappointing the result may have been for the other three candidates (Roger Bannister, John Burgess and Heather Wakefield), this was certainly not a resounding vote of confidence in Dave Prentis, and suggests most members feel disconnected from their union. This is especially worrying at a time when the public sector workforce is under unprecedented attack.

But the story of the 2015 election may be

far from over in the wake of revelations that emerged just as the campaign was drawing to a close in early December.

On 21 October an anonymous whistle-blower recorded a meeting of paid officials from the union's London region at a meeting presided over by regional secretary Linda Perks. While the ostensible reason for the meeting was to discuss UNISON's role in the campaign against the Tory government's Trade Union Bill, the first 23 minutes of the meeting were devoted to a discussion of what regional officials had already done to secure branches' nominations for David Prentis and what more they could do to ensure his re-election. In short, there seemed to be irrefutable evidence of wilful breaches of the union's own election rules and the abuse of UNISON resources. Linda Perks' remarks also contained a clear implication that

Mr Prentis was aware of, and 'grateful' for, the work that paid officials were undertaking on his behalf. He adamantly denies any knowledge of wrongdoing.

News of the audio recording spread via social media at the start of December and sparked a slew of complaints from members of the union's national executive and numerous branch secretaries (including yours) to UNISON HQ and to Electoral Reform Services (ERS), which the union pays to oversee the running of its national and regional elections. Press interest has been modest, but articles about the election scandal have appeared in the pages of *Private Eye* and on *The Guardian* website.

While Dave Prentis is not himself the subject of an investigation, a limited internal investigation is under way and regional secretary Linda Perks has been at least temporarily 'relieved of

her duties'. Meanwhile, rumours continue to circulate of further evidence that would confirm that the rule-breaking activities were not unique to the London region at the same time as ERS has yet to produce a returning officer's report that was due the week of 11 January. In short, this sorry saga could run and run.

Your own branch committee has called for an independent investigation of the allegations arising from the audio recording of the London regional officials' meeting and for a re-run of the election, given the apparent weight of the evidence and the seriousness of the breaches of UNISON's own rules. Much as we need to focus on doing battle against the Tory government and its austerity agenda, there is also an urgent need to dispel the cloud that hangs over our own union.

Anton Moctonian (1955-2015): Farewell to a Class Fighter

The former Assistant Branch Secretary (Blue Collar) of Camden UNISON, Anton Moctonian, died unexpectedly of a heart attack at his home in Camden on 28 December. News of his death caused shock and sadness among Camden caretakers, whom he had ably represented over the years and among dozens of activists in UNISON and other unions. Anton worked in the Council's Housing Department from



1993 until he left in September 2006, having first served as a shop steward in NUPE (one of

UNISON's precursor unions), and was also briefly co-chair of the newly formed UNISON branch. He earned a reputation as a doggedly effective representative in disciplinary hearings and played a key role in building the branch after the difficult merger between NUPE and NALGO in the mid-1990s.

After leaving Camden, Anton completed academic studies at Keele University and went on to become a respected tutor and

lecturer for the Unite union, contributing to the development of a new generation of union activists across much of Britain. Anton is survived by his partner of nearly three decades, Vaughan Thomas, who is himself a key RMT activist. Camden UNISON extends its deep sympathy to Vaughan at this difficult time, while remembering with gratitude the major contribution Anton to the branch's first decade.

Victory on appraisal scheme

John Shepherd UNISON assistant branch secretary/CSF co-convenor explains why Camden has dropped its appraisal scheme

John Shepherd UNISON assistant branch secretary/CSF co-convenor explains why Camden has dropped its appraisal scheme. Following three years of campaigning against the performance related pay (PRP) and appraisal scheme, we are very pleased that we have eventually persuaded management to drop the scheme.

Camden UNISON had used the 2013 figures to demonstrate that the scheme penalised workers earning under £40k, black and minority ethnic staff, part-time workers, workers aged over 40 and disabled workers, and our extensive survey also showed it was deeply unpopular and demotivating for most members.

We put in a freedom of information act request for the 2014 figures, which management refused then refused our appeal. We then complained to the Information Commissioner, who has the power to force Camden to disclose the information. However in discussions with HR we agreed to drop our complaint in return for Camden dropping the scheme. Camden has now launched a new appraisal scheme called 'My Performance'. While we remain opposed to PRP on principle, we believe this is a significant improvement on the previous scheme. However, we do still have some areas of concern which we have raised with management.

Key features of the scheme are:

- abolishes the 1-5 ratings
- abolishes annual appraisals in favour of ongoing supervision and support
- expressly maintains a link to the NJC national pay award for all staff
- means bigger pay rises for the vast majority of staff (2% plus NJC award for those not at the top of their grade)
- reduces differences in treatment with the lower paid, abolishing 'performance zones' for staff in the SP grades (old scale 6 and below), which made it nearly impossible to progress

beyond the midpoint of the scale, and allowing bonuses like those which can be earned by the higher paid

- gives underperforming staff the ability to get the pay increase once their performance becomes satisfactory.

Key concerns that we have are:

■ that staff on the old contracts are going to be denied increments for not performing well. This is something which is in the green book of national NJC terms and conditions, however historically management have not previously enforced it (although now nearly all staff on the old contracts will be at the top of their grades in any case)

■ that there is no right of appeal for underperformance. This should be a right at least for staff on old contracts in the green book (including union representation), so we believe it should be for staff on the new contracts as well

■ sickness: for staff on the old contracts sickness cannot be taken into account in terms of awarding increments. Therefore we believe it shouldn't for staff on the new contracts either.

■ we would want to ensure that performance ratings and recognition payments are awarded fairly, as we are concerned that bonuses may still be awarded disproportionately to high earners and those in more project and office based roles. So we have requested a regular full breakdown of payments made, broken down by amount, pay level (0-£20k, £20-30k, £30-40k etc), part-time/full-time status and equality characteristic. This has been agreed by management, who also expressed their intention to work with us in monitoring this. We would encourage members to feedback their views and any queries or concerns for us to take back to senior management. Please contact John Shepherd to discuss (John.Shepherd@Camden.gov.uk).

February 2016

CAMDEN EYE

Migrants are not to blame – stop the scapegoating

An ugly backlash against refugees and migrants is sweeping Europe. In Stockholm a masked, club-wielding gang attacks children; in Denmark the government introduces legislation to confiscate asylum seekers' belongings; French riot police fire CS into the 'Jungle' camp set up by refugees. Here Prime Minister David Cameron cynically abuses language, referring to 'swarms' and 'bunches' of migrants. On 30 January the most violent fascist demo the country has witnessed for decades took place in Dover.

Cameron knows very well what he's doing when using such phrases. He's hoping to deflect attention from the reality of his government's austerity policies and encourage British voters to scapegoat migrants for a range of social ills from NHS waiting lists to the critical shortage of affordable housing. Meanwhile, London becomes a giant safe deposit box for the super-rich, whatever their country of origin.

The trade union movement has a critical role to play in refuting myths around migration and in ensuring Cameron's ilk don't succeed in a dangerous game of divide and rule.

CAMDEN UNISON ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

9 March 2016, at 3:30 pm

Council Chamber, 1st floor, Camden Town Hall

Judd Street, WC1H 9JE

Guest speaker: John McDonnell MP, Shadow Chancellor

The Future of Libraries

Open+ is one of several radical self-service systems that allow the public to borrow items, book PCs do their own printing and photocopying etc, without any staff input. It involves installing this technology in all library buildings as well as an access system, possibly by swipe card, when the buildings are unstaffed.

The future of the library service is under threat. You may think not closing any libraries to save £800,000 sounds like good news. This is not the case when you look at the recommendations in the report, passed by Cabinet on 16th December.

■ Self-service for mornings and evenings by investing £220,000 in new technology, leading to job cuts for library workers and the ethos of a public library service being available to all for afternoons only. The report refers to Peterborough and Barnet councils, stating this new way has been 'embraced by users'. But our colleagues in Barnet report a different story, with continuing problems with alarms and gates, usage of the library reduced and fewer children and women are coming when unstaffed.

■ Implications for library workers are manifold: only 2 staff at non-peak times, mornings and evenings, one of which could be a security guard. Risk assessments have not even been done yet to determine this figure as safe. But this is just the be-

ginning. The implication of enhanced Open + could mean that eventually libraries could operate without any staff at all. But libraries are not just about minding the shop; we provide activities for children, rhyme times, class visits, and craft sessions. Home visits for the house-bound and vulnerable; a service which they recommend should be run by volunteers. We support literacy and learning, and increasingly we have become the front face of the council, more so as it goes digital, dealing with a wide range of issues such as housing applications, etc. In addition, we are the hub of communities helping to relieve social isolation.

UNISON fails to see how absences will be accommodated with such tight timetables, presumably as they are managed now, by the goodwill of staff that stay late, start early or swap shifts at short or no notice. Library workers have yet to be told how many of them will be retained, as the planned cut is £340,000. We have just been told it will be in double figures, so your guess is as good as ours.

We asked Councillors to consider the true cost of this £800k 'saving' and its potential impact on other overstretched services and reject the recommendations in the report. Alas, they didn't listen to our views. However, we will continue to oppose these cuts and defend the jobs of members.

Housing Steward Maddy Cooper explains why the Tory Housing and Planning Bill will decimate council housing and force tenants to choose between their homes or their job

THE HOUSING BILL

Major threat to Council and Housing Association tenancies

■ Pay to Stay: this states that any council tenant or housing association tenant who earns £40,000 pa, in London (£30,000 pa, outside) has to pay the market rent. Tenants will be means tested using HMRC records to establish the income of the two top earning household members.

Right to Buy 2: gives housing association tenants the right to buy their homes with a subsidy that will be paid for by forcing councils to sell their most expensive homes when they become empty. In Camden this could result in the loss of 300 homes year on year, ultimately devastating our housing stock.

The Bill will also phase out secure tenancies and their succession to children and replace them with two to five-year tenancies. This Bill has to be resisted. Mass campaigns have defeated attacks before and we can and must do it again.

What you can do?

Write to your MP now and demand they vote against this Bill.

If you are a council or housing association tenant and may be affected. Email Camden UNISON paul.england@camden.gov.uk

We need to know how many of our members could be in the firing line. Keep your steward informed.

Camden Council is campaigning against this Bill and UNISON will work with it and anyone else who wants to resist. For more general information check out the Defend Council Housing website <http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk/>

The Council has now set a date for its 'housing summit' against the Government's Housing & Planning Bill, due to take place on: 11 February from 6.30 PM in the Council Chamber, Camden Town Hall.

Stand up to Racism

■ There is an urgent need to challenge the negative rhetoric some leading politicians and sections of the media are now using towards refugees; and to pressure the government to offer a more permanent solution for the people living in camps in France who want to reach the UK. Refugees are living in terrible conditions in Calais and Dunkirk, less than 200 miles from both London and Paris, the capital cities of two of the world's wealthiest countries. Many refugees have fled war, poverty and violence. They need urgent humanitarian assistance.

Trade Unionists 4

Calais is an initiative to use the progressive voice of the trade union movement to show solidarity with people in need and to counter attempts to scapegoat refugees for social problems made worse by the austerity agenda. Many of the refugees have fled their home countries in part because UK-backed wars. Stand Up to Racism is planning to head to Calais (12 - 21 February) with trade unionists ready to volunteer with organisations working with refugees. Two Camden UNISON members will be joining this delegation bringing donations of money

and essential items. They will report back to the Branch in March regarding what more we can offer in the way of practical assistance and solidarity. Plans are for people to help in the distribution centres, teach or offer support with English and help with distributions in the camps. Alongside volunteering there will be daily meetings to discuss the refugee crisis, anti-racist activities and what trade unionists can do in their workplaces to build solidarity with refugees.

Phoebe Watkins
Branch Chair (job share)

The Trade Union Bill must be defeated

The Trade Union Bill is a major threat to trade unionists and civil liberties. We must defeat it. Strike action is at historically low levels. After years of savage cutbacks and pay restraint the Conservative Chancellor George Osborne has announced a further four years of drastic pay restraint across the public sector, accompanied by unprecedented funding cuts. The Tories are also keen to accelerate the privatisation of public services. Trade unions are the biggest potential obstacle to their plans. The Trade Union Bill is aimed at undermining unions' ability to organise and campaign against this onslaught.

Jeremy Corbyn

'Only through collective representation that workers have the voice and the strength to reverse the race to the bottom in pay and conditions.'

The Tories are determined to tip the scales still further in the direction of the employer. That same rigging of workplace power is what has led directly to the explosion in executive pay and boardroom excess, while low wages and insecure employment have mushroomed under Cameron.' Jeremy Corbyn, Leader of the Labour Party, 10 December 2015

Under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership the Labour Party has pledged to repeal the legislation in full, but there's no immediate prospect of a General Election before May 2020.

What the Bill will do

The Bill takes priority in the Government's efforts to tighten further restrictions on union activity that already among the most severe in the western world. It focuses on further restricting lawful industrial action and on weakening union finances as it:

- Would require at least 50% of all eligible members to vote in an industrial action ballot and in a range of public services deemed 'important', including primary and secondary schools, at least 80% of those voting - or 40% of the eligible membership - would need to vote 'YES' to call a lawful strike. (The Government has pointedly refused to allow workplace ballots or online/electronic balloting that would probably increase turnout)
- Limits the authority of a strike ballot to a four month maximum
- Empowers employers to use agency staff to replace workers taking lawful strike action
- Imposes more stringent restrictions on picketing
- Would end the Deductions of Contributions at Source, DOCAS system for collecting union subscriptions through the employer's payroll and,



• Would impose arbitrary cuts to union facility time for branch officers, shop stewards and Health & Safety representatives. It appears that the Government has only accepted a delay in the implementation of the provision to axe DOCAS until the end of 2017, while an amendment scrapping frankly absurd restrictions on unions' use of social media is also likely to feature in the final version.

Nationally the trade union response has been weak. UNISON and other unions have submitted evidence to the House of Commons Bills Committee and have encouraged public sector employers to oppose the Bill. A lobby of Parliament on 2 November attracted more than 3,000 participants including a number of UNISON stewards who met with Holborn & St Pancras MP Keir Starmer. In Scotland, all local authorities have declared their opposition to it and pledged not to implement its provisions. A number of councils in England, including some in London, and also in Wales have adopted resolutions in opposition. Our branch will continue urging Camden's Labour Councillors to adopt a similar public position. Senior branch officers have spoken to Camden's Chief Executive and the Assistant Director of HR about the Bill. The TUC announced a week of action against the legislation from 8-14 February to coincide with the debate in the House of Lords, where the Lords may dilute some of its provisions, or not alter its fundamental content. UNISON, as the union whose members have been hardest hit by the 'austerity agenda', should be taking an aggressive lead in organising a national demonstration against the Bill, preferably on a weekday. Ultimately, the best way to protect the right to strike is by exercising it. Active trade unionists should take heart from the successful strikes at SOAS and the National Portrait Gallery (see page 7). The government is deeply unpopular. It's time for bold opposition.

Corbyn's election: People want real change

Jeremy Corbyn was a 200-to-one shot for the Labour leadership. By late July he had secured UNISON's unexpected backing and on 12 September he won an unprecedented victory with nearly 60% of the vote. This was despite unrelenting attacks from a hostile media, often fuelled by members of a mainly rightwing Parliamentary Labour party, Jeremy Corbyn is now very much the Labour leader. UNISON members should not see Corbyn as a latter-day messiah, but for the first time in a long while Labour has a leader who is unabashedly supportive of trade unionism.

The dramatic growth in Labour's membership, combined with the scale of Corbyn's victory, shows widespread discontent with the prospect of never-ending austerity, as well as anger at Labour's own failure in the preceding five years to seriously oppose savage cuts in public spending. Historically, most union leaderships' absolute priority has been on winning elections. If they believe Corbyn cannot win forthcoming elections they will move against him. Few if any of us will agree with each and every position espoused by Jeremy Corbyn, but collectively we've a real interest in defending his leadership. This is best done by campaigning where we have common policies and aims such as opposing Trident's renewal, supporting Stop the War, opposing austerity and reversing privatisation.

How the union branch operates

With the shop steward and branch officer elections taking place at this time of year, this is chance to explain how the branch works and to encourage you to consider becoming a steward.

The *shop steward* is your team mate, your first point of call when you require support, and the backbone of the branch. Collectively shop stewards operate across directorates and together make up the *directorates stewards committee*. Stewards committees meet every 4-6 weeks to discuss issues relevant to their directorate, plan for members' shop meetings, agreeing issues to take to management etc.

Stewards receive training, get support from more experienced activists and get a couple hours per week to cover their duties.

There is a system of Health and Safety Reps with many stewards carry out both roles.

At the first shop stewards committee of the year the stewards elect their Convenor. The convenor is in effect the lead shop steward. The convenor gets a larger amount of time to do their union duties – they convene the stewards committee, support the shop stewards and take on representations for members that need support – something experienced shop stewards also do. Directorate stewards meet with management regularly to raise issues on your behalf.

There are a number of branch officer posi-

tions whose role is to represent the membership across the Council – the roles include Branch Chair, Branch Secretary, Treasurer, Health and Safety Officer, Publicity Officer etc. You can see all the branch officer positions and who currently holds the positions here www.camdenunison.org.uk

The main decision making body of the branch (between all members meetings) is the Branch Committee which meets every 4-6 weeks. The branch committee is made up of branch officers, representatives from the shop stewards committees, and representatives of self-organised groups. The branch committee has an overview of the work of the branch, initiates campaigns, agrees donations and other ways to show solidarity with other groups of workers and campaigns. The branch committee gives direction to our activities.

In addition to representing members directly employed by the Council we also represent workers that work on outsourced, privatised contracts.

Our Branch Office is not far from 5PS – on the other side of St Pancras Station at 59 Phoenix Road, Brille Place, NW1 1ES. Branch work is supported by three workers employed by us – a Branch Office Assistant, Branch Office Manager, and Branch Office Organiser.

(Please visit www.camdenunison.org.uk for full article)

Barry Walden

Lively Health & Safety week



Camden UNISON marked European Health and Safety Week with an open meeting on the 20th of October at the Town Hall Council Chamber. Sean Breslin reports back on Health and Safety Week

(Please visit www.camdenunison.org.uk for full article).

Bullying and harassment – is it on the increase?

What is bullying and harassment? Both these terms are used interchangeably, and many definitions include bullying as a form of harassment. In general terms, bullying and harassment is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of people in the workplace, and may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed

as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient. A recent ACAS study published in November 2015 found that bullying is on the increase in the workplace and in Britain, and people are afraid to speak out.

Bullying and harassment in the workplace can have a negative impact on your mental health and your performance at work. If you ever feel that you are suffering from bullying and harassment, your manager/s have a 'Duty of Care' to you to ensure that any kind of bullying and harass-

ment stops immediately and that they take punitive action against those responsible if your allegations are substantiated. Everyone should be treated with dignity and respect at work. Bullying and harassment of any kind is in no-one's interest and should not be tolerated in the workplace. If you feel you are being bullied or harassed, you may not know what to do about it. Always seek help and advice about what to do.

(Please visit www.camdenunison.org.uk for full article)

Black workers in Camden

If you are being bullied, you can seek advice from the Camden Black Workers Group (CBWG) which is supported by UNISON. CBWG is an inclusive group embracing* Black and all ethnic strands of the work force.

We are aware this is an issue that can affect anyone.

Don't suffer in silence: You can speak to a colleague, seek advice from your local rep or contact the branch office. Keep a diary to record the nature of the bullying and when it occurred or make a formal complaint (always get advice before taking this formal route).

Visit website for full coverage of bullying at work: www.camdenunison.org.uk

**Black: in this context 'Black' is used to indicate people with shared history. 'Black', with a capital B is used in a broad political and inclusive sense to describe people in the UK who have a shared past history, and have suffered diminished opportunities in today's society. 'Black' is not about colour, it's about empowerment. It's about heritage. It's about self-definition.*

Tax Credit Government U-turn – but watch out for Universal Credit. The government has been forced to make a U-turn on tax credits, but the implementation of Universal Credit will still make a drastic impact on low income families who are already struggling to meet the cost of living.

Black workers on mental health

The 2016 National, Regional Black Members conference (NBMC) took place in Llandudno, North Wales. In total 700 delegates represented UNISON's 12 regions in the country, 180 members from Greater London region were in attendance. Five delegates from Camden Black Workers Group attended.

UNISON General Secretary, Dave Prentis, and Heather Wakefield, head of local government service group. Matilda MacAttram, director of Black Mental Health UK spoke on the impact of mental health and Gloria Morrison founder of JENGBA, delivered a speech about the organisation's campaign to to change the application of the joint enterprise law so that innocent people are not wrongly convicted. It is a controversial 300-years-old-

law which led the House of Commons Justice Select Committee to call for an urgent review, in December 2014, into the common law doctrine of joint enterprise in murder cases. Conference heard that according to evidence presented to the House of Commons Select Committee, 2014-2015, a large proportion of those convicted of joint enterprise offences are young Black men, of which 37.2% are serving long prison sentences, which is eleven times the proportion of Black/Black British people in the general population and almost 3 times as many as in the overall prison population. Conference passed a motion on The Stigma of Mental Health in Black Communities. Delegates heard that a report from the Mental Health Foundation, a

leading research organisation in the UK, showed that Black people from the UK:

■ are more likely to be diagnosed with mental health problems;

■ more likely to be admitted to hospital;

■ more likely to experience poor outcome from treatment;

■ more likely to be disengaged from mainstream mental-health services, leading to social exclusion, and a deterioration in their mental health.

Conference heard further that where English is not the first language, you are more likely to be over diagnosed. In addition, while African Caribbean groups, living in the UK have a low rate of common mental health disorders than other groups, they are more likely to be diagnosed with severe mental illness, to be sectioned, and brought to

mental institutions by the police. Speakers on the issue of mental health reported that the police were being called by health professionals to mental health hospitals as a general practice, where frequent use of tasers, batons, and dogs are commonly used to manage and restrain mentally ill patients. It was reported further that there are higher incidences of suicide among young Asian women who found it difficult to engage with mental health services. Motions passed at conference are referred to the National Executive Council (NEC), the decision-making body of UNISON.

● If you are interested in becoming involved speak to your local reps or contact CBWG (www.camdenunison.org.uk) Telephone (020) 7974 1633).

SOAS: Wildcat walkout wins the day

When management at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) suspended long-standing UNISON branch secretary, Sandy Nicoll, late on Wednesday afternoon 28 October, he faced the prospect of a gross misconduct charge and summary dismissal on a trumped-up charge. A false allegation arose in the midst of a student occupation opposing threatened cuts and course closures as well as supporting

the demand for 'in house' employment of ancillary workers. Thankfully, fellow UNISON members, lecturers and hundreds of students at the University of London College, where Sandy has played a key part in winning the London Living Wage, improved holiday and sick pay for cleaners and other workers on outsourced contracts, had other ideas.

By 8.00 the following morning scores of co-workers and students

were already protesting outside the main SOAS building near Russell Square with the vast majority of UNISON members effectively going on unofficial strike on both Thursday 29 and Friday 30 October. A lunch-time rally on the Friday attracted hundreds of supporters, effectively shutting the principal building. Meanwhile, nearly 180 academics from the college signed an open letter to the new SOAS director, Baroness Valerie

Amos, demanding the case against Sandy be dropped.

By Wednesday 4 November management had beat a dramatic retreat, with Sandy back at work and the threat of dismissal dropped. While he did face a minor sanction, the remarkable response of his fellow trade unionists and students made all the difference, showing in the process that workers can successfully defy the anti-union laws.

Friday 19 February AGM agenda closes 5pm send items to: paul.England@camden.gov.uk

Wednesday 9 March annual general meeting at 3:30 PM

(Council Chamber, first floor, Camden town Hall, Judd Street, WC1H 9JE)

Guest speaker: John McDonnell MP, Shadow Chancellor

Management have agreed paid time-off for members, along with travel time: - subject to needs of services."

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

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Camden Eye

Newsletter of Camden UNISON

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● Want to get involved? We need writers, cartoonists, photographers.

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● 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.

44 Years and Counting – Pete Ainsley retires

I first met Pete in 1974 when I was about to start a job with Camden council.

We were both members of the international socialist group (the forerunner of the SWP) and I wanted to ask him about the trade union set up in Camden. The main union then for white collar staff was Nalgo and Pete played a key part in the Nalgo action group, an organisation of socialist activists who were trying to turn Nalgo from an old-fashioned “chief officers” association into a modern democratic trade union. At that stage the main focus was the development of proper shop steward organisation based on individual work places and groups. In Camden it was the housing and social services departments which were in the forefront of this movement. Pete and I both worked in social services.

Over the next few years Camden became a leading branch in establishing effective shop steward organisation – something that eventually became the norm for Nalgo nationally. Although Pete never stood for any of the leading positions within the union his role in helping to shape the organisation shouldn't be underestimated. he was for many years the editor of Nalgo action news which in the days before the mass use of computers was a vital communication tool for rank and file activists. Within Camden, Pete also edited the branch magazine – “public eye”-a role which he has again fulfilled in recent years (anybody interested in learning more about this period should visit the union office and look through the archives).

Pete is a committed socialist but not dogmatic. Pete's approach to explaining his position is always thoughtful. He always listens to the other person's point of view and I have never heard him try to win an argument by shouting the other person down. As the title of this piece suggests Pete has always had a strong commitment to the idea of public service and that element of his day to day work has been very important to him. However he has also managed to develop a wide range of other interests and is one of the most widely read and knowledgeable people I know. I hope that his retirement will give Pete the opportunity to spend more time pursuing some of his other passions.

John Mann

Pete has been a good friend since I started working at the council in 1979 – a long time - a bit of a walking talking archive of labour



history. He always has the latest pamphlet, leaflet or newspaper in his bag relevant to what was going on. It is a credit to him that his passion around the climate change agenda has helped to raise the profile of this issue around the whole trade union movement.

However, to this day, he still carries a big bag around with him full of leaflets for the next demonstration, and copies of the branch newsletter to give to other branch activists to spread the news of what is going on. Even when I was off work on maternity leave, he would come round each week with the latest leaflets, a copy of socialist worker and a quick chat. My kids knew of him as “postman Pete” and were convinced he worked for the post office. But he has not quite found a way round reducing paper production to fit in with his climate change principles! I am sure that in retirement, he can find ways to surf the internet to his heart's content and leave his bag behind! Pete will I am sure remain very much part of the union branch's machine – we would be a bit lost without his amazing knowledge and dogged chasing all of us for the necessary stories of union successes, campaigns and protests.

Phoebe Watkins