

December 2008/Issue 13

GPF challenges privatisation and commissioning

2008 has been another year where the GPF has funded campaigns that challenge privatisation and commissioning – a core priority for UNISON.

Wakefield and Pinderfields UNISON health branch have been fighting the PFI for their hospital and in 2001 the GPF commissioned Professor Allyson Pollock to analyse and report on the Outline Business Case (OBC). Now the GPF is funding a follow up study looking at the Final Business Case (FBC).

The first report, *"Debts, Deficits and Service Reductions: Wakefield Health Authority's legacy to primary care trusts"* helped the branch to campaign and to engage with the process to get the best deal for their members. The report also had national significance, as it demonstrated how PFI was being used to cut back on services and raised serious questions about hidden costs and lack of planning. The report concluded that financing new capital investment through PFI is extremely costly and would result in service cuts and that for Wakefield this would mean that local residents would see their acute hospitals downsized in return for new investment.

Now, thanks to the GPF, Wakefield branch can follow through eight years later, as the hospital building is underway and the costs have escalated from £250m to £343m. Prof Pollock will compare the FBC with the OBC to determine the effects on matters such as staffing levels, staff terms and conditions and work practices; whether the scheme has delivered on its promises; what has happened to services and risk transfer.

Torbay branch has used GPF funds to challenge a new business model being proposed by their council that would see the council give up direct service provision in favour of strategic commissioning. Barnet local government branch in north London is also challenging a hostile council that wants to review and shrink the council with the likely transfer of services to the private sector through a series of strategic partnerships. Barnet sought funding from Barnet council but applied to the GPF so that they had the reassurance of knowing that they would get the help they needed, even if the council did not fund the support.

UNISON Equality Scheme – making it happen

The GPF is playing its part in delivering UNISON's Equality Scheme. Our job is to fund political campaigning on the priorities of the union, including those on equality areas - at branch, regional and national level and in service groups, self organised groups, retired members and young members. Our action plan over the coming year - to seek to promote equality through the GPF - is one we are confident of delivering as we take active steps to support equality related bids, including an annual overview of applications for GPF support on equality activities.

Examples of bids on equality related issues over the last twelve months have included: supporting Show Racism the Red Card, anti-BNP campaigning during and after

elections; Pride events; Liberty Disability festival; initiatives on combating racism in the regions; Melas; State Pension Centenary campaign; Diversity event; International Women's Day; Community cohesion events/campaigning; National Minimum Wage 10th Anniversary events; research on low pay, among a few.

Consultation on the draft Equality Scheme, and its action plans, has recently closed and responses will be taken into account when publishing the next version of an evolving plan.

To keep up to date on how the scheme develops, visit www.unison.org/equality/scheme.asp



Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival 2008



Photo: Ken Terry

The annual 2008 Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival got off to a tremendous start on Friday 18 July 2008. This continued for the next two days, concluding with a speech from UNISON's General Secretary Dave Prentis, speaking as TUC President. The UNISON contingent, led by a local samba band was the largest section of the annual march with representatives from branches as far away as Hull, London and Wales.

The event commemorates the early trade unionists that were transported to Australia for forming a lodge of the Agricultural Labourers' Friendly Society. The three-day festival is predominantly a political trade union event

but has become a real family occasion with participants attending from the whole of the UK.

UNISON's marquee had stalls from south west welfare, education, black members and LGBT members. We also showcased Changing the Climate at Work and Positively Public campaigns as well as promoting support for the recent local government action.

Rosie McGregor, UNISON south west regional convenor thanking the GPF said:

"It was the most significant festival of all time and UNISON's input made me proud to be a member. You could not go anywhere on

the festival site, or through the village of Tolpuddle, without seeing GPF flags and banners."

Ken Terry, senior regional officer and secretary of the south west GPF committee (communications and campaigns) said.

"Without funding from the GPF we would not have been able to hire the marquee, the marching band, or purchase the many flags and banners which will be used for many years to come.

The festival closed with a tremendous speech from Tony Benn and sessions from bands including "Seize the Day" and "The Levellers".

Liberty 2008



Richard Barnes, Deputy Mayor of London joined UNISON members at the Greater London Authority's sixth annual free public festival celebrating disabled people's rights. Liberty sets the standard for inclusion and access and profiled some of the hottest talent that London's Deaf and disabled community has to offer. Funding from the GPF of £6,000 provided us with "Supporter" status at the event. UNISON is the only trade union to have a presence to Liberty.

GPF in Cymru/ Wales

Thanks to funding from GPF UNISON Cymru/Wales has been involved in a number of key campaigning events during 2008. These include:

Combating racism and fascism

This was linked to the local government elections in May and involved us in anti-BNP activities and campaigns with other trade unions, community groups and anti-racist groups. A very successful event was hosted by Searchlight Cymru/UNISON at the Welsh Assembly Senedd, involving all political parties in alliance against fascism.

National Eisteddfod for Wales

This annual event is the major cultural event of the year in Wales. UNISON's presence there has improved year on year and has been excellent for our profile within the region. We are the only non-teaching union with a presence at the Eisteddfod and it provides us with a unique opportunity to network with other organisations, politicians and members as well as providing us with an opportunity for recruitment.

Show Racism the Red Card

Funding provided towards educational workshops at football/rugby clubs throughout Wales. These events gain a high media profile and ensure the anti-racist message gets to millions of people. UNISON will provide speakers for each of the workshops to ensure our message gets across.

Cardiff City FC – Football in the Community

Purchase of advertising space in the community magazine, raising our profile within the community among young people in particular.

GPF in Scotland – from hospital parking to housing via Burma

GPF funding has meant a wide range of initiatives in Scotland have been able to deliver political and organising work at an international, national and branch level. The lion's share of Scottish bids went on the key priority of anti-racism work.

In January, the Committee approved a grant of £4,700 to allow the union to take a full part in promoting our policies to four of Scotland's five major political parties. (the Labour party work is of course funded via the LabourLink). Successful fringe meetings have been held at Scottish Liberal Democrats, Greens and the SNP – and stalls with UNISON material were prominent at all these and the Conservatives.

At branch level GPF money allowed the Glasgow Housing Association branch to start to commission research into the business cases set up by housing associations as second-stage transfer of the ex-council stock threatens staff with further outsourcing. The second stage of this funding is now being requested to look at the new bids.

In May successful bids were submitted to fund UNISON's continuing involvement as a key participant in Glasgay!. We have agreed with the festival that the 'Gay Prom' idea of last year will be transformed into a 'Vogue Ball' and UNISONScotland's LGBT group are heavily involved in assisting with the organising of this and UNISON's profile will be very prominently displayed to the Scottish LGBT community.

In addition to our involvement with the Edinburgh World Justice Festival – a major advert in the programme and involvement in the organisation of three key events as part of the festival - the GPF also funded a series of well-attended performances of 'The Burma Play' – a drama outlining some of the struggles of democracy campaigners in Burma – at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

More recently the campaign led by UNISON – and in particular the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde branch – against the introduction of car parking charges by NHS boards at many hospitals across Scotland, has led to funding of work with Paul Martin MSP on a private members bill opposing this. The campaigning has already led to the Scottish Government's welcome intervention to reduce and then stop charges at NHS car parks. But the campaign continues until privately contracted car parks – including those at PFI hospitals are also covered

All the above add up to a very successful package of projects that have kept UNISON in Scotland at the forefront of the political campaigning agenda. Clearly worthwhile investment from our General Political Fund.

NHS 60th anniversary event

UNISON was a major contributor to this key event celebrating the 60th anniversary of the NHS in Wales, the birthplace of Aneurin Bevan, its creator. The event was addressed by the Welsh Assembly first minister, Rhodri Morgan and Paul Robeson Jr. Entertainment was provided by local poets, the joint Male Voice Choirs of Tredegar and Ebbw Vale (Bevan's constituency) and Billy Bragg.



Give your UNISON event a real lift



The UNISON hot air balloon is provided through the union's General Political Fund.

It's an ideal way for you to boost political campaigns, community events or to promote UNISON generally. Bookings are FREE to our branches – all we ask is that you plan the event with your region in advance to maximise the promotion of the union on the day.

Hurry and book now as the contract expires on 31 July 2009.

Please contact Brian Crosby, UNISON East Midlands Regional Centre.

Email: b.crosby@unison.co.uk or telephone 0115 847 5460

For further information on obtaining a form and full guidance or to order more copies of this newsletter, please contact **Christine Rixon**, GPF Organising Officer.

Tel: 020 7551 1575

Email: c.rixon@unison.co.uk

Or visit www.unison.org.uk/politicalcampaigning

GPF Committee

Members of the GPF Committee are elected from the GPF levy payers on the union's NEC. Current membership of the General Political Fund Committee is as follows:

James Anthony
Sarah Bradfield
Jane Carolan
Graeme Horn
Maureen Le Marinel
Annette Mansell-Green (Co-Chair)
Helen Rose
Alison Shepherd
Sian Stockham
Linda Sweet
Chris Tansley (Co-Chair)
Steve Warwick

The officers servicing the Committee are:

Christine Durance
Head of Policy Development

Christine Rixon
GPF Organising Officer

What do we do?

The General Political Fund Committee is entrusted under the rule book with responsibility for overseeing expenditure from the fund. We provide an important resource within the union for political campaigning, as well as taking a number of initiatives to positively promote UNISON's profile.

UNISON uses its GPF to pay for political campaigning at branch, regional and national level as well as for research and lobbying in Parliament, where it liaises with a group of MPs to pursue UNISON's objectives. The GPF is independent of support for any political party.

Any branch that has members contributing to the GPF is eligible to apply for financial support from the fund.

