



Coalition Cuts— South East Edition

Pensions summit report

"We will carry on negotiating over pensions - because that's what we do as a trade union and because it's what our members want. But at the same time - we are still in dispute and our industrial action ballot is still valid for further action if needed.'



That was the clear message which came across at this morning's third UNISON pensions summit, before the service group executive meetings to consider the current state of negotiations and agree the way forward. The summit, which brought together more than 250 key activists from every region and relevant service group, reviewed the successful day of action on 30 November, and the progress it had achieved.

"We took industrial action for industrial reasons," general secretary Dave Prentis recalled of the day he called the proudest of his union life. "UNISON was the lynch pin of the action," he added, "and we did it because negotiations had broken down - the government was saying that it would move to impose changes."

But the strength of the action had seen the government back down, returning to the table and negotiating properly. In the NHS Pension Scheme, this had resulted in an outline for future negotiations and in the Local Government Pensions Scheme, the withdrawal of statutory consultations on changes to contribution and accrual rates for April 2012 and government acceptance of a negotiating framework which will see no changes until 2014. And in both schemes, a key advance since 30 November is the agreement to keep the Fair Deal on pensions, including 'admitted body status in the LGPS, which means public service pensions will be available for all public service workers, even if their jobs are outside the public sector - as is the case with 25% of current LGPS members.

The decision facing the union now was whether to continue with those negotiations, said Mr Prentis. "This is not D Day," he pointed out. "It's not a day we're being asked to decide a settlement and call off action." As a member-led union, negotiating to secure decent pension schemes for public service workers, UNISON will continue talking to get the best and fullest details in any proposals. And it will be UNISON members, through ballots, who will decide if any proposals are acceptable. In the meantime, UNISON is still in dispute and the industrial action ballot from November remains 'live' and Mr Prentis added: "If negotiations fail or break down as they did in September, we can still take action."

The summit also heard report-backs from the consultations that have been taking place in every region of the union since the new year and the 'heads of agreement' proposals received just before Christmas. In every region, the summit heard, the feedback had been that the majority of branches and members backed continuing negotiations. There are still many problems to overcome, UNISON activists recognised, but Mr Prentis summed up the mood of the meeting when he declared: "We are not defeatist. We know how to win by taking our members with us.

"If our objective is decent pensions schemes for public service workers, we will achieve it."

Protecting jobs, promoting good practice— *Arts Professional, December 2011. Steven Warner, Dartford Branch Secretary and Stephanie Cesana, Regional Organiser*

Britain is noted for its volunteering culture. Giving something back is a powerful instinct in our national fabric and, as a result, society has benefited from this fund of goodwill. In recent times, the ethos of volunteering has gained popularity as the Tory-led coalition government unveiled its flagship policy in building "The Big Society".

On volunteering opportunities, UNISON has adopted a position similar to its stance on the challenge of privatisation and compulsory tendering. It argues against volunteering in delivering services and warns of the dangers of job substitution by placing volunteers in key roles that were previously filled by paid staff. Whilst UNISON recognises that volunteers can make a valuable contribution to an organisation, the union opposes the use of volunteers to replace paid staff.

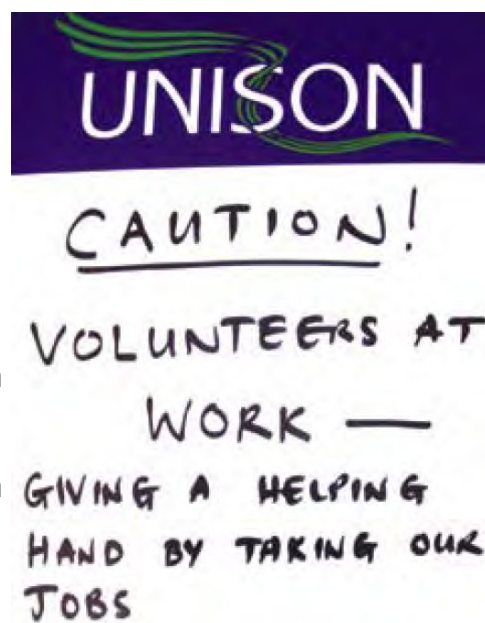
In both the public and private sector, the volunteering trend is now gathering pace in the arts. Following the Government's spending review, cash-strapped local authorities up and down the country are being forced into privatising their theatres to commercial operators. The temptation is for such operators servicing local authority contracts to show an unhealthy interest in volunteers by recruiting armies of goodwill ambassadors in an effort to maximise profits by reducing staffing and contract costs.

UNISON has been following the case of a group of 25 workers, predominantly women, on low incomes engaged in ushering and front of house duties who were all transferred to a commercial operator under TUPE regulations. Due to new voluntary activity they have been left with little or no work despite numerous pledges from the Council and their new employer that their employment would be protected. The volunteer recruitment drive referred to volunteers as 'ushers' and UNISON is concerned that there was not a sufficient difference between volunteer 'meters and greeters' and [paid staff, and that this was simply a ploy to reduce contract costs and use volunteers as a cut-price alternative to paid staff.

It is the lack of clarity in distinguishing the roles of volunteers and those of paid staff apparently carrying out the same duties that is the heart of the problem. Where someone is performing tasks that would normally be carried out by paid workers, this would imply job substitution and does not equate to good volunteering practice. Volunteering England considers volunteers are being substituted for paid employment if they are:

- Working for a commercial or profit-making organisation
- Performing jobs or tasks that were formerly carried out by paid employees
- Performing jobs or tasks which, because of their continuous, repetitive or unattractive nature require to be paid
- Performing jobs or tasks for employees who are in dispute with their employer.

In general, it is not seen as acceptable for people to volunteer in the commercial sector, but if volunteers are engaged at 'for profit' venues, they are used to add value by complementing and supplementing the work of paid staff, without replacing them. In some public sectors too, such as in the NHS, the library service and the police, UNISON has also objected and campaigned strongly about this practice, as it appears to undercut the status and wages of paid staff and to exploit the times and skills of unpaid volunteers. A related issue is the provision of financial inducement for performing a job or task. If an inducement is offered, UNISON says it should be at the market rate for the job, with the recognition that the individual is an employee and not a volunteer.



Rewarding volunteers with theatre ticket vouchers and other benefits every time they appear for work implies an employment relationship. It is Volunteering England's view that "by giving volunteers a reward with an economic value...[a theatre] could be seen to be creating a contract of employment under the National Minimum Wage Act, which could confer employment rights on the 'volunteers' and open the Theatre to investigation by HM Revenue and Customs". Volunteering England recommends that volunteers should only be reimbursed for expenses incurred in the course of carrying out the role and that receipts should be provided for this purpose. In addition, if a volunteer is in receipt of state benefits, Jobcentre Plus and HM Revenue and Customs can investigate instances of suspected 'notional earnings'.

As for the ushers who now find themselves without work, one commented: "The whole process has been very traumatic and upsetting and can only be viewed as a vicious attack on our jobs which has left all of us displaced and essentially without work. We will continue to voice our opposition and campaign against the volunteering measures".

In 2009 the TUC and Volunteering England agreed on a set of key principles on which volunteering is organised and how good relations between paid staff and volunteers are built; the 'Charter for Strengthening Relations between Paid Staff and Volunteers' is a valuable starting point for any organisation thinking of involving volunteers. Organisations must understand both the good practice and legal implications of volunteer involvement in order to ensure that volunteering remains a valuable and harmonious experience for all.

THE CHARTER FOR STRENGTHENING RELATIONS BETWEEN PAID STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS HIGHLIGHTS THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

- All volunteering is undertaken by choice, and all individuals have the right to volunteer, or indeed not to volunteer.
- While volunteers should not normally receive or expect financial rewards for their activities, they should receive out of pocket expenses.
- The involvement of volunteers should complement and supplement the work of paid staff and should not be used to displace paid staff or undercut their pay and conditions of service.
- The added value of volunteers should be highlighted as part of commissioning or grant making processes but their involvement should not be used to reduce contract costs.
- Effective structures should be put in place to support and develop volunteers and the activities they undertake, and these should be fully considered and costed when services are planned and developed.
- Volunteers and paid staff should be provided with opportunities to contribute to the development of volunteering policies and procedures.
- Volunteers, like paid staff, should be able to carry out their duties in safe, secure and healthy environments that are free from harassment, intimidation, bullying, violence and discrimination.
- All paid workers and volunteers should have access to appropriate training and development.
- There should be recognised processes for the resolution of any problems between organisations and volunteers or between [paid staff and volunteers].
- In the interests of harmonious relations between volunteers and paid staff, volunteers should not be used to undertake the work of paid staff during industrial disputes.

For more information visit www.volunteering.org.uk or contact Steven Warner on steven@unisondartford.co.uk



UNISON in the Community

Godalming Town Football Club would like to thank the University of Surrey branch of UNISON for providing new training shirts for the Youth Team. The photo shows Ross Pooley and Tom Richardson posing with the new shirt before the cup match against Egham Town.

UNISON Members at Sussex Police & Justice branch were among some of the thousands of public sector workers ensuring the rest of us remained safe on Christmas Day.



MARK FARRINGIA - Custody Administration

Mark worked on Christmas day at Chichester Custody Centre (Reliance). Mark was doing administration and supporting his fellow custody assistants and Police.



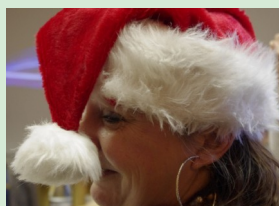
DEAN ALLGOOD - Controller -NRC Haywards Heath

Dean worked 6am to 4pm at North Control Room, Haywards Heath. Took 999 calls and sent neighbourhood Response Police Officers out to those people that required urgent/emergency assistance.



NIGEL ROBINSON - Brighton Custody

Nigel worked from 2.45pm to 11.15pm as a custody assistant looking after all people arrested and taken in to custody, finger printing, DNA and welfare checks.



JO RAGGETT - Steward & Health and Safety Rep

Jo worked from 7am in the morning, and was up ridiculously early to open her stocking! Jo took calls from officers and PCSO's doing checks on the public and vehicle stop checks. She also recorded stolen vehicles and missing people who were reported by the public. This was Jo's 4th Christmas Day and Boxing Day working.



SUSAN LYDON

Susan was manning the 0845 non emergency police number in the police contact centre at HQ.

UNISON South East would like to thank all those members who worked over the Christmas period, ensuring public safety and keeping the country running!



Matt King 2012

We are desperately seeking personal stories from members who have been affected by the cuts. Please get in contact and let us know how these changes have impacted on you- contact j.mason@unison.co.uk and we'll get it in the next newsletter.

Don't forget to add your branch activity to the Million Voices website and check out what other branches have been up to- <http://www.unison.org.uk/million/branches.php>