



Summer 2008

International Newsletter

A quarterly newsletter on UNISON's international work



National delegate conference 2008

Delegates hear from international speakers and engage in debates on Palestine, Burma and southern Africa

James Clancy, President of Canada's National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) said his



union would 'steal, borrow, however one would describe it to incorporate the work you've done....into our own work'. He was referring to UNISON's record on lay

education, pay equality, pensions, *I love the NHS* and *Speak up for public services* campaigns, and the union's 'unrelenting' work in supporting workers in other countries.

Clancy paid special tribute to fellow delegates from Zimbabwe who would be returning to an uncertain future following the conference. He said there was a likelihood of them being 'picked up/swept up and taken away' simply for carrying out their work as trade unionists.

UNISON hosted a number of international guests at conference this year including representatives from unions in Zimbabwe, Swaziland, South Africa, France, Germany and Iraq. Members had an opportunity to meet them at UNIZONE which showcased the work of the international unit. There was also an opportunity for delegates to hear first-hand accounts of the worsening situation in Zimbabwe.

Decisions taken at conference included:

- urging regions and branches to develop links with counterparts in Colombia,
- working with sister trade unions in southern Africa on their campaigns to defend, build and strengthen public services and tackle HIV/AIDS,
- campaigning on the threat to the public delivery of the provision of water and sanitation services;

- Economic Partnership Agreements; WTO negotiations; and World Bank and IMF policies and activities, especially in the area of health service provision;
- promoting projects to support the Palestinian trade union movement in the Occupied Territories,
- examining the investments of UNISON members' pension funds with a view to calling for disinvestment from companies involved in the occupation of Palestine and on the Burma Campaign *Dirty List*.

First-time speaker Toe Aung, union rep (and branch international relations officer) at the University of Bristol spoke in support of the emergency motion on Burma. Toe Aung, who left Burma 22 years ago, spoke movingly about the impact Cyclone Nargis has had on the country following the military government's unwillingness to allow in a steady stream of foreign aid. Conference agreed the emergency motion which called for support for the two trade union federations operating clandestinely within Burma (trade unions are banned outright) and to support the TUC Burma Cyclone Appeal.

The complete motions can be viewed online at www.unison.org.uk/conference

International seminar autumn 2008

24-26 October, Leicester

Registration is now taking place for the weekend international seminar for branch and regional international officers.

Details

www.unison.org.uk/international/pages_view.asp?did=6283

Branch application form

www.unison.org.uk/file/branchform.doc

Good news for Latin America

Significant recent events in Latin America show the way forward in finding progressive solutions

At the end of June, after a long campaign waged by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, trade unionists and others, the European Union has finally lifted the unjust sanctions imposed on Cuba, signally hopes of a more positive engagement between the EU and Cuba - and despite the wishes of the United States.

The success in lifting the sanctions shows the value of concerted effort by MPs, trade union general secretaries, union branches and individual members, all of whom have put pressure on the British government to shift their position - a move which was key to changing the attitude of the EU as a whole. And the beginning of July brought the news of the rescue by the Colombian military of Ingrid Betancourt and 14 other hostages held by FARC.

UNISON, along with other trade unions in Justice for Colombia, which has campaigned for a humanitarian exchange of prisoners, warmly welcomed the release of Betancourt and called for the release of all other hostages held by FARC. Having been held for over six years Betancourt's release could signal key developments which might bring about an end to the long running armed conflict in Colombia. Betancourt herself has called on FARC to release the other hostages and to give up their armed struggle.

In August Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, won a recall referendum ensuring efforts to end the effective disenfranchisement of the country's indigenous communities are successful.

Turkey crackdown on trade unions continues

UNISON joins global campaign calling for release of health and social services trade union leader Meryem Özsögüt

A global campaign has been launched calling for the release of SES (trade union of public employees in health and social services) Board member Meryem Özsögüt who has been in prison since January 2008. She was arrested after taking part, on behalf of her union, in a press conference denouncing the killing of an activist; an action that the Turkish authorities have labelled as 'terrorism'. Her arrest and continued detention appear to be part of the Turkish authorities'



relentless crackdown on trade unions. The government has alleged that her arrest is in connection with membership of a 'terrorist organisation' and not in connection with trade union activities. This approach to trade unions is an increasing tendency of some governments (we have seen it in the Philippines, Colombia, Egypt) to brand trade unions as terrorist organisations and to describe participation in lawful trade union activities as engagement in terrorist activities.

UNISON calls for Meryem's immediate release and urges members to sign the Labour Start petition, and get others to become involved in the campaign. www.labourstart.org/meryem

Zimbabwe

Conference hears first hand of repression in Zimbabwe and daily threats to trade unionists

As the negotiations over the future government of Zimbabwe continue, UNISON has been active in its support for our sister unions in the country who are battling against harassment and intimidation - as well as the dire and deteriorating economic conditions. NDC delegates were able to hear first hand about the situation from key representatives of one of our long time sister unions, the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA). They described both the terrible living conditions as well as the threats that active trade unionists face on a daily basis from the regime.

UNISON will continue to support our fellow trade unionists as they struggle against the odds to defend

workers rights and liberties in Zimbabwe during these very difficult and dangerous times. We also continue to support the leaders of the ZCTU who face 'criminal charges' for speaking up for trade unionism and against the appalling excesses of the regime. (sign the petition in support of ZCTU www.wearezctu.org).

UNISON branches can play their part in supporting colleagues in Zimbabwe. Offer whatever support you can - either directly or through Action for Southern Africa www.actsa.org - to demonstrate that trade unionists in Zimbabwe are not isolated and that they have wide international support to bring about a better life for their citizens.

Combating the far right in Germany

UNISON initiative with German union ver.di continues to strengthen ties between the two unions in the regions



In May a workshop on how trade unions can take action against the far right was held in Birmingham. The workshop, however, did not concentrate on the activities of UNISON in opposing the British National Party (BNP), but was led by activists from our sister German public sector union, ver.di.

Annett Schulz and Thorsten Shaefer provided an in-depth explanation of the growth of far right organisations in Germany and how ver.di as a trade union was responding to this. They illustrated the diversity of their efforts with examples of support for anti-fascist demonstrations, political campaigning, educational work, and by sponsoring anti-fascist projects.

The growth of the far right, especially the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), has been relatively successful in the old industrial cities of the 'East', now left to stagnate in a reunited Germany. These are the areas where the promise of German reunification has failed to deliver in terms of creating equality and raising standards in the old 'East'.

Unemployment is high relative to the prosperous

'West'; wages low (where there are jobs), and the housing stock is inadequate. The lack of investment by both the public and private sectors has left sections of the population with no faith in the policies of the traditional political parties leading to widespread disillusionment. Conditions for the growth of the politics of hate are ideal, and the far right in Germany, as in the UK, is exploiting these.

The presentation was interspersed with slides and video extracts from news reports and live footage from far right web sites. These showed both sides of the face of fascist organisations; on the one hand violent and racist, and on the other a façade of respectability, in an attempt to appear as a mainstream political party.

Despite the many differences between the UK and Germany, the social and economic conditions that provide opportunities for the growth of the far right are to be found in both countries. The challenge of the far right to democratic freedoms is small but growing, though it is more advanced in Germany.

The workshop which was part of an exciting weekend for young members in how they engage in international work was another step towards building closer links with ver.di and strengthening our capacity to make the far right irrelevant in both countries. West Midlands UNISON will be reflecting on the variety of ways ver.di challenges the far right and consider how these challenges can be integrated into the current approach in opposing the BNP.

Check out the website for future events and training in the regions www.unison.org.uk/events/index.asp

Good news from Egypt

Workers organisation in Egypt reopens after many months of intimidation

The Center for Trade Union & Workers Services (CTUWS), a non-governmental organisation, 'announces the conclusion of a bitter chapter' in its fight to operate and represent the interests of ordinary workers.

It suffered all sorts of arbitrary measures over the past year and a half including the forced closure of its premises. As a result CTUWS activities were prohibited. Also, its general co-ordinator, Kamal Abbas, was sentenced to one year's imprisonment in a lawsuit last year. The court of appeal annulled the sentence in a decision earlier this year.

Following on from the court decision on Kamal Abbas the administrative court issued a judgement

regarding the closure of CTUWS offices and lifted the ruling.

The CTUWS was awarded the French Republic's Human Rights Prize in 1999. Through the international development fund (UIDF), UNISON funded CTUWS to run a project to raise awareness on the effects of International Financial Institutions' and WTO agreements on domestic policies. The project included workshops on workers' rights, ILO conventions and international law.

It is through UNISON's international solidarity initiatives that workers' organisations such as the CTUWS can fight arbitrary attacks on their legitimacy.

World justice festival Edinburgh

World Justice Festival welcomes delegates from Venezuela and Cuba

Edinburgh hosted the second world justice festival in June with UNISON Scotland as the main sponsor. The festival grew out of the **MakePovertyHistory** campaign and brings together a range of NGOs and campaigning groups. This year was the second year of the festival, and it goes from strength to strength with UNISON at the heart of it. UNISON organised meetings on Burma, Latin American Alternatives and Climate Change. Other organisations involved this year included Venezuela Information Centre, Bolivia Information Forum, Peru Support Group and Scottish Cuba Solidarity Campaign.

The Latin American Alternatives meeting focused on the ALBA agreement (A trade agreement for



improving people's lives, not making profits) and looked at politics, resources and the Bolivarian alternative for the Americas). Speakers (pictured) included William Suarez, First Secretary to the Venezuelan Embassy, Gladys Allyon, Cuban Institute for Friendship with the peoples and Nick Buxton of the Bolivia information forum.

Events and publications

20-21 September, Birmingham

BIROs training, West Midlands

www.unison.org.uk/westmidlands/pages_view.asp?did=6702

20-22 September, London

Branch international work, Greater London

www.unison.org.uk/events/london.asp

24-26 October, Leicester

International seminar for branch international officers

http://www.unison.org.uk/international/pages_view.asp?did=6283

UNISON International Unit Annual Review

Hard copies available on request from the unit

<http://www.unison.org.uk/file/review.pdf>

Sewerage Works, a report by PSIRU

Water and sanitation in developing countries

Hard copies available on request from the unit

www.unison.co.uk/international

Action on HIV/AIDS

Working worldwide to tackle HIV/AIDS

Hard copies available on request from the unit

www.unison.org.uk/file/HIV.1.pdf

 Palestine Solidarity Campaign



In June UNISON's National Delegate Conference passed a motion on Palestine. Included in the motion was a call for regions and branches to affiliate to PSC and invite speakers to address their meetings. Dave Prentis said: 'It is important that more branches affiliate and give their support to this very important campaign'. You can affiliate to PSC at www.palestinecampaign.org

International Unit

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Reminder to all branch international officers!

All future correspondence (including the newsletter) from the international unit will be sent electronically or posted on the website. Please ensure you have an email address on RMS, and if you already have one, please check that it is a current one. You will miss out on all future mailings if you do not have a current email address.