

Safety in numbers

UNISON's health and safety newsletter

Issue 7 Summer 2015



The fight goes on

Following the election of a Tory government by a narrow majority, Dave Prentis, UNISON general secretary called on members and activists to continue to fight for UNISON's values of a fairer society.

He said: "We will continue to fight to protect our members' rights, their jobs, and their pay. We will stand up to ministers if they put our members' jobs and livelihoods at risk, or they threaten those things we all care about – the NHS, the public services we all rely on and the quest for a fairer society."

Tracey Harding, UNISON national officer for health and safety said: "We are all obviously disappointed

at the general election result, and after the damage the Tories inflicted on workers' health and safety in the previous five years, we have justifiable fears over what they will do in their second term. However, rather than allowing these to depress us we must use them as motivation to recruit more safety reps, campaign on health and safety and remind the government and the public of its importance."



UNISON health and safety seminar

UNISON's national health and safety seminar debated and discussed the damage the Tory government has had on workers' health and safety.

First Donna Rowe-Merriman, UNISON senior national officer, reminded the audience of the importance of health and safety by telling them how her mother was forced to retire after losing the sight of her eye because of

the negligence of her employer. Then Tracey Harding, UNISON national officer for health and safety explained the theme of the seminar "The people, the politics and the policies." She also spoke of the damage the government had inflicted on health and safety, and how they had made it harder for members to get justice should they get injured.

Another speaker Geoffrey Podger, former chief executive of the Health Safety Executive (HSE) was critical of recent government announcements regarding commercialising the HSE. He was particularly concerned about any moves that would make the HSE totally financially dependent on fees from employers, which he said would

be like "putting the fox in charge of the chicken coup."

Finally the seminar heard Hugh Robertson, the TUC's senior policy officer for health and safety, warn of how the message about increasing resilience was a byword for pushing workers until they break. This issue was particularly relevant for UNISON's members who have been victim of the cuts in public services both in terms of job losses and increases in workloads and stress levels.

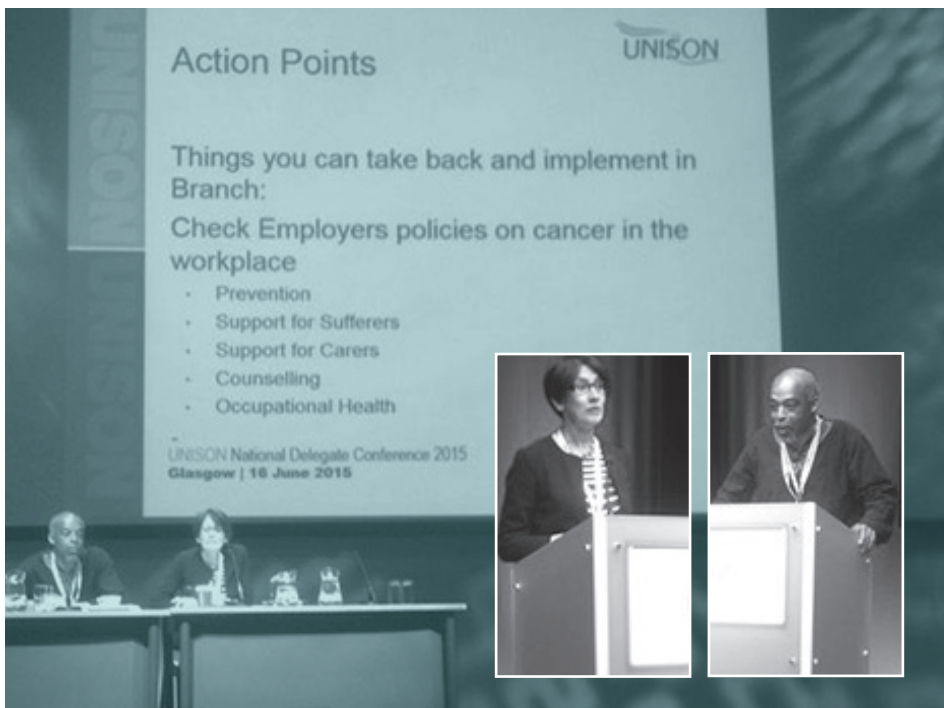
These themes were then carried forward to be discussed in the afternoon workshops that covered issues such as bullying, assaults at work, the law, and recruitment and organising.



National Delegate Conference (NDC): cancer in the workplace.

It is a reality of the 21st century that cancer will touch the lives of almost all of us. Everyone knows someone who has had cancer, is living in remission or is caring for a loved one with the disease. That was the message of Liz Egan Macmillan Cancer Support speaking at the health and safety fringe at UNISON NDC. She also highlighted the level of support the 750,000 people of working age who live with cancer, plus the 500,000 who work full time whilst caring for someone with cancer, should expect from employers.

Peter Daley, chair of the National Disabled Members Committee, the spoke of his own personal journey through cancer and Tracey Harding, UNISON national officer for health and safety summarised the main action points the audience could take back to their branches.



International Workers' Memorial Day (IWMD) 2015

28 April was International Workers' Memorial Day (IWMD) and as usual UNISON used the day to remind members of why health and safety matters. In events



covering all four countries of the United Kingdom, from Glasgow, to Hartlepool, London, the Medway Towns, Cardiff and Belfast, UNISON activists, members and officers remembered the dead and vowed to fight for the living.

UNISON also used the day to launch its newly updated guide on "Hazardous substances at work" (stock no. 3506, available from the UNISON online catalogue). This followed on from a survey of UNISON safety reps where almost one third identified chemicals, solvents, dusts, dermatitis and hazards as being within their top five hazards at work.

UNISON marks the second anniversary of the Bangladesh clothes factory disaster.

UNISON marked the second anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster by supporting a short walking tour of London's Oxford Street, organised by Labour Behind the Label/ War on Want. The tour involved visiting Benetton, Primark, Matalan, Mango, Gap and other major brands whose

clothes were made at Rana Plaza - where more than 1,000 workers lost their lives two years ago.

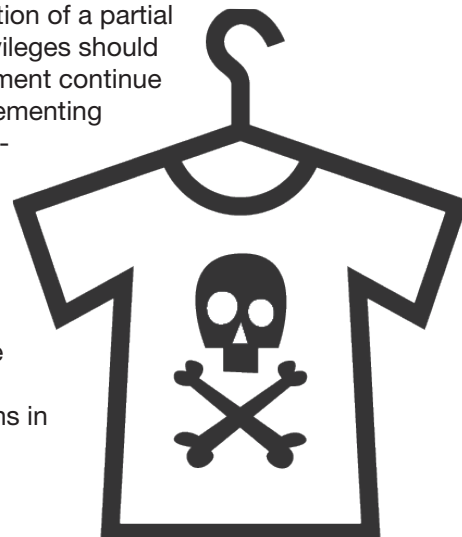
On 24 April 2013, Rana Plaza collapsed with the loss of at least 1,134 lives - the worst industrial disaster in Bangladesh's history. As well as the dead, the victims include workers who lost limbs or sustained injuries which could mean they may never work again, and children orphaned by the loss not only of their parents but also the family bread winner.

UNISON has repeatedly called on the multinational companies whose clothes were made in factories housed in the Rana Plaza building to contribute to the compensation fund. It is still \$9m short of its target.

UNISON also, working through the International Trade Union Confederation, called on the European Commission to use its trade influence to ensure the momentum for reform in Bangladesh is not abandoned.

This includes consideration of a partial suspension of trade privileges should the Bangladesh government continue to drag its heels in implementing vital labour law reforms - reforms they committed to implementing after the Rana Plaza disaster.

Finally UNISON is working in partnership with "Labour Behind the Label" to support two independent trade unions in Bangladesh.



UNISON offers top tips for tackling difficult behaviour in schools



UNISON used its school support staff seminar in Cardiff to launch its guide in managing the sometimes difficult behaviour of pupils.

Support staff need to know the best way to respond in different situations, whether it's breaking up an argument or a fight between children, protecting someone who's being picked on, or being faced themselves with abusive language and challenging behaviour.

"Managing challenging and difficult behaviour is one of the main issues that concerns our members," says UNISON head of education Jon Richards.

"The teacher is theoretically the authority, the person in charge. But teaching assistants, technicians, caretakers, admin and finance staff, learning support, cooks and cleaners - every one of these staff has some contact with pupils, even if they're not based in the classroom.

"So how do they deal with disruptive pupils? Who do they report problems to? If they intervene, what support and backing are they going to get afterwards?

"These are very important questions. Unfortunately, it is too often assumed that only teachers need support or training on behaviour management. Support staff are often overlooked."

That's why UNISON commissioned an expert in the area, Tom Bennett, to write this guide. He is a behaviour consultant, who has visited over 100 schools to coach and mentor staff in basic behaviour techniques. He's also the behaviour advisor for the Times Education Supplement, and a teacher himself and was recently appointed by the government to help teachers deal with difficult behaviour in the classroom.

His guide includes sections on diffusing difficult situations, improving communication style, talking to parents and dealing with accusations made by children about each other.

"The job is treating rubbish – It shouldn't mean getting rubbish treatment."

That was the stark call from UNISON's Dave Watson after a survey of members working in waste management across Scotland's local authorities revealed a workforce under pressure, facing increasing targets and declining budgets.

"Councils and the Scottish government should start realising," added Mr Watson, UNISON Scotland head of bargaining and campaigning, "that they can't expect staff

to meet more stringent targets when they are being cut back."

A union report - Dumped On: working in Scotland's waste management services - details the experience and expectations of a workforce trying to do their job in a constantly changing environment. Waste management has become a more demanding task in recent years, with staff having to deal with demands for more and more complex recycling at the same time as budgets are being put under pressure. These burdens are set to increase as targets for more waste to be recycled or reused are going up and council budgets are being squeezed still even further, warned UNISON.

Mr Watson said "every political party claims they want to increase recycling rates and is signed up to the idea of a Zero Waste Scotland. Well if councils and government want less waste – they are going to have to invest in more people to make that happen. They need to be prepared to put their money where the litter is".

Injured workers find it harder to get justice

The government's "unnecessary, unjustified and misguided" attacks on health and safety regulation mean "it is now harder than ever to get justice after an injury at work, consequently it is more and more important than ever to join a trade union".

That was the message UNISON assistant national officer Robert Baughan delivered at a Westminster Forum seminar on health and safety regulation.

The seminar - on "health and safety reform: regulation, litigation and risk" – also featured speakers from the Department of Work and Pensions and the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr Baughan criticised changes to the law that have made it harder for workers to get compensation for injuries at work.

He also criticised how government cuts have made it harder for the Health and Safety Executive to provide constructive support for good employers, and punish the bad ones. He explained that what both responsible employers and workers want is not a deregulated free-for-all, but transparency and proper enforcement of robust health and safety standards, so that responsible employers are not undercut by irresponsible ones.



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