

MEET THE ACTIVISTS

This edition: **New Young Members Officer**



Daniel Robertson

Position in Unison? **Branch Young Members' Officer**

Job title/employer/workplace?

Office Administrator – Shetland Charitable Trust

Reason(s) for becoming active?

I heard about all the good things that UNISON does for workers through Stefanie Pottinger the branch treasurer and Mary Anderson the Life Long Learning Officer. I asked Stefanie what there was for young people and she did not know so I looked into the campaigns and I thought it would be worthwhile trying the post of Young Members' Officer and working with UNISON to help get better treatment for employees.

What does your post involve?

The responsibility of the Young Members' Officer is to promote and recruit young members. The campaign of 2006 for young members means I have to identify two key activists and increase the number of young members. Unlike most other branches we have a very small number of young members, in the region of 54. I am working on a recruitment plan at the moment which I hope to launch soon, this focuses on attracting skillseekers and modern apprentices.

Hopes for the future?

To make Shetland a better place for young people to live and work.

Hobbies and interests?

I spent a lot of my time working with young people through the many different groups that I am involved in. One group involves making a website for young people about Mental Health Issues, I recently won an award for the work that I had done for this group. www.talking2ourselves.com (be sure to check it out after May). I am also involved in Youth Voice Shetland (local youth council), Youth Bank Shetland (gives grants up to £300 to groups of young people), YoungScot (website author), Big Lottery Fund and the Northmavine Development Company.

Daniel is happy to hear from all young members and prospective members:

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Who's Who and where- Local Officers and Stewards

Chair	Brian Smith	01595 744354
Vice Chair	John Leach	01595 744858
Branch Development	Tracey Leith	01595 692973
Officer/Secretary/Co-ordinator	Kaila Tarrant	01595 692019
Branch Meetings Secretary	Val Turner	01595 694688
Equalities Officer	Amanda Pearson	01595 696698
Health & Safety Officer	Jim Grant	01595 744871
Membership Records Officer	Michelle Goudie	01595 744859
Membership Services Secretary	Barry Edwards	01595 744202
Newsletter Editor	Karen Fraser	01595 743868
Retired Members Officer	Donald Silk	01595 692451
Stewards Co-ordinators	Elaina Leach	01595 744816
	Graham Stiles	01806 522722
Treasurer	Stefanie Pottinger	01595 744994
Union Learning Rep.	Mary Anderson	01595 744992
Young Members Officer	Daniel Robertson	01595 744995
DEPARTMENTAL STEWARDS		
Assessors Office	Kaila Tarrant	01595 692019
Drugs & Alcohol Services	Amanda Pearson	01595 696698
Economic Development	Marvin Smith	01595 744921
Education Services	Tracey Leith	01595 692973
	Susan Jamieson	01595 809217
Environmental Services	John Leach	01595 744858
ICT	Heather Jones	01595 744701
Legal Services (Market Street)	Karen Irwin	01595 744095
Library	Karen Fraser	01595 743868
Organisational Development	Peter Peterson	01595 74 4538
Planning	Gwenan Hughes	01595 744834
Ports and Harbours	Barry Edwards	01595 744202
Social Work (St Olaf Street)	Fiona Morton	01595 744442
	Shirley Mackay	01595 744450
Social Work (Viewforth)	Heather Butler	01595 692760
Shetland Amenity Trust	Mick Clifton	01595 694688
Wastview Care Centre	Margaret Forrest	01595 809483
WORKPLACE CONTACTS		
Finance	Andrew Hall	01595 744649
Social Work (St Olaf Street)	Francis Prittie	01595 744447
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Yarns



28th March: A Day of Action

UNISON workers in Shetland came out in force on Tuesday the 28th of March to support the one-day strike against the attack on local government pensions. They joined with members from other local unions - AMICUS, the GMB, the TGW and UCATT— to give a total turnout of about 1000 workers, and shut down a range of council services.

Many schools and offices were closed, as were public toilets and the Library. Roadworkers, refuse collectors and ferry workers (except for one crew on the Bressay ferry) also came out. Arrangements were agreed in the event of emergency ferry runs and gritting, while essential care services were also maintained. UNISON members who were required to work in life and limb situations on 28 March, members who weren't balloted for the strike, and members who

went to work on 28 March for any other reason were asked to donate a day's pay to finance the dispute.

The day began with a picket of many workplaces. Members of all the striking unions then gathered at the market cross, before setting out on a march to the Town Hall. There was a diversion aboard the rogue Bressay ferry, which was occupied for some time by the marchers, to protest against the crew's decision to run.

At the town hall, a letter on behalf of the joint unions was presented to convenor Sandy Cluness, setting out the union view on the unfairness of the proposed pension changes.

The impressive turnout was reflected across the UK, with an estimated one million local

government employees on strike. The action was effective and helped win improved terms for discussion from the Local Government Association This led to the further planned strike action being suspended by UNISON on the 12th of April. More pictures inside.

Inside:

- Mass meeting
- Single Status
- 800th member
- School support staff
- Strike photos
- Why bother?
- AGM
- Get involved
- Equal pay
- Meet the Activists
- Who's Who

Mass Meeting



Febrary 9th 2006:

The branch executive called a mass meeting and 230 members packed the Islesburgh venue to hear officers spell out their concerns over the single status deal being offered by management.

Brian Smith opened the meeting by saying that Single Status was still a good idea as it tackled long-standing pay inequalities, but that the council wanted to introduce it on the cheap. Pay model projections showed that many lower-paid UNISON members could do badly.

Regional Officer Emma Phillips described how negotiations were hampered because information on pay projections was not being shared with UNISON negotiators. Reps needed adequate time to negotiate, prepare and study proposals, and this was proving difficult due to pressure of work.

She described other negotiations she had been involved in, where workers had been outraged when settlements were revealed. In Moray and Aberdeen some people found their salaries dropping from £18,000 to £11,000, and in Aberdeen a mass meeting attracted so many protestors that it caused a traffic jam. Both these settlements had to

go back for re-negotiation, and the same could happen in Shetland if an acceptable agreement was not arrived at.

UNISON negotiator Austin Taylor outlined how the graphs of 'winners' and 'losers' might look, but stressed that until the union got proper information he could not make definite predictions: what was clear, however, was that if the council remained determined to keep the pay bill the same, there would be many losers.

Steward Barry Edwards also presented projections on how much a pay cut could add up to over a working life, and said that because of the 34/37 hr adjustment, *most* members could be losers.

There followed a discussion with questions and views from the floor. Brian Smith said that UNISON was being criticized by officials for causing delay, and had been told by Graham Spall to 'show leadership' and advise people to accept the deal! But while delay might be an inconvenience for those who would do well, it was the duty of union officials to consider the losers, and of course the pay of chief officials would no be affected.

Emma said that some workers had been traditionally underpaid, and this

would continue the longer this goes on, but that that was no reason to accept a bad solution: those with equal pay claims can take action now.

It was asked whether the SIC could just impose a solution: in theory they could, said Emma, but this would be a long process, as all workers had to be made redundant and re-employed on new contracts. Brian questioned whether the SIC would really be stupid enough to do this, as the last thing needed was a demoralized workforce.

It was stressed that UNISON members would be balloted on any settlement arrived at, and that the only way to have a strong voice was to be in the union and persuade others to join too.

Members then unanimously passed the following resolution:

'This meeting repeats its support for the principles of Single Status and equal pay in local government and public life.

'It rejects an outcome which bears heavily on low-paid administrative and other APT&C staff, and degrades the terms and conditions of large numbers of employees.

'The meeting instructs Unison's negotiators to negotiate an acceptable result to the Single Status project in Shetland, by continuing to scrutinise the pay model and other proposals with care; by keeping members in touch with developments, with a view to reaching a fair result for all parties; and by urging Shetland Islands Council to fund a reasonable pay deal for their staff.'

EQUAL PAY IN SCOTLAND'S LOCAL COUNCILS

Why do we have a problem?

You may have seen media reports about some high profile job evaluation disputes in local councils in different parts of Scotland. Job evaluation came about after the Single Status Agreement was implemented by local government unions and employers in 1999.

What is this and what is UNISON doing?

Single Status was signed to harmonise pay and conditions of different groups of local government workers (APT&C and Manual). The aim was to adopt a single pay spine and same conditions. UNISON signed up to deliver fairness, and counter discrimination.

In the last 6 years much has changed. Despite constant pressure from UNISON many local authorities have failed to address their responsibility to assess jobs timeously. Equal pay legislation has also meant that job evaluation has had to be used to address pay discrimination in local authorities. Plus funding settlements for local authorities have failed to include the extra money needed and local authorities have tried to deliver equal pay at little or no extra cost.

What we're doing

UNISON wants to deliver equal pay and fair compensation for those who have suffered discrimination. We have pursued compensation claims and negotiated on job evaluation. We have spent much time identifying equal pay cases that we can pursue at Tribunal.

We have also argued that all staff should be fairly treated. Negotiating maximum protection where people lose out; changes to jobs; improved training and career progression and have taken action to defend members. We have also want this to be introduced without sackings and service cuts.

Local authorities have wanted to do this with little or no cost. UNISON says that this is not possible - we are being proved right.

Pay Up for Equal Pay

We also want the government to shoulder its share of the responsibility. Funding settlements for Scottish Local Government have taken no cognisance of the requirement to provide equal pay in local government. We are campaigning to ensure that the Scottish Executive funds the creation of pay systems in Local Government that are objective, transparent and free from sex bias. They should also fund compensation for previous discrimination. This they are doing in other parts of the public service - why not in local government?

UNISON members deserve fair pay scales, and deserve compensation for past discrimination. Other members pay jobs and conditions should not have to pay for this. Nor should the public through cuts in services or big rises in Council Tax.

If you think you have a claim please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to me, Tracey Leith, details on back cover.

AGM

The 2006 branch AGM took place at Islesburgh on the 20th March. Branch Chair Brian Smith thanks all the activists for their work and commitment over the year.

Membership was increasing in a steady stream, he said, and the reason was that there was always some new onslaught from government or employers to contend with. A union only does its job effectively with involvement from all of its members, he said, calling on more officers and stewards to come forward.

There followed the election of officer bearers and appointment of workplace stewards. The revised Who's Who of officers, stewards and workplace contacts is on the back page.

Questions and discussions centred again on the single status negotiations. Officers reported back that after the show of support and the resolution passed at the mass meeting in February, there had been a further meeting of the negotiating sides and management had expressed a willingness to look at extended pay preservation for workers, and a £1000 buy-out for workers moving from a 34 to a 37-hour week. Some members protested that £1000 was cheap for an extra 3 hours work a week over the next 20 years.

It was stressed that members would get to vote on the final package and that negotiations were complex and ongoing. The pay model had taken over as the burning issue once it was realised how many members could lose money. Barry Edwards urged people to make sure they had union representation at this time. (see below)

Austin Taylor said that a sum of about £1.4 million could bring down the number of losers to a more acceptable level, and the union nationally thought more money should be put in to fund the process.

Regional Officer Emma Phillips rounded off the meeting with a talk uncannily similar to last years: the attack on pension rights and the upcoming industrial action. She urged everyone to support the strike on the 28th March.

The meeting finished with the usual delicious buffet supplied by COPE.



Tracey Leith and Austin Taylor compare notes at the AGM

GET INVOLVED

By Barry Edwards, Membership Services Secretary

I have been asked to write a few words on the need for more workplace representatives. I believe an excellent reason for this need can best be summed up by two words, Single Status!

We are all aware that the Terms and Conditions of Local Authority employees are currently under threat on a couple of fronts. There is the "85" rule concerning pensions, the effect of which is fairly straightforward, widely understood and has been communicated extensively by the unions nationally.

Then there is the much more complex and potentially far more damaging issue of Single Status, for which there has been little guidance coming from the national officials, with the exception of our regional officer Emma Phillips. Protecting your interests is therefore being left to the local workplace representatives. They are the best route to having your views and concerns heard and of being kept up to date with progress (or lack of it), but there are too few of them to adequately cover all areas.

For our union to be representative of its members in the workforce it needs workplace representatives.

If there isn't already a representative in your workplace, why not discuss it with your colleagues and see if you can get a volunteer. Failing that, why not agree to take turns on an annual basis?

Being a representative doesn't have to be onerous or time consuming, but if it ensures that members' views are being heard then it is worth doing.

Remember that under the Council's Single Status proposals, there is a high probability that you, or a colleague, will be worse off - so have that discussion, agree who the representative will be and who knows, if it's you, you may even find it worthwhile and enjoyable.

The following important posts are vacant and we'd like to fill them:

- **Education and Training Officer**
- **International Officer**
- **Welfare Officer**

Workplace Stewards or Workplace Contacts are always needed.

Training is available for all these posts.

Contact Elaina Leach (contact details on back page) for more information.

MORE AND MORE MEMBERS

Our membership continues to rise and rise. During March we got a record 33 new members, from Baltasound to Wastview to Market Street. Issues like the pensions dispute and single status make people realise that they need trade unions - to protect themselves, and to make sure that the workplace is speaking with a united voice.

Beth Spence (below), Finance Officer with Shetland Amenity Trust recently brought the membership level of our branch to 800.

Vice-Chair John Leach presented Beth with a UNISON 'Goody Bag'.

The membership level as we went to print was 827. Could you be the one to recruit the 900th member?



School Support Staff

By Tracey Leith

Representatives from UNISON, T&GWU and the GMB met with officers from Personnel and Education in February to discuss a current review of school support staff being carried out by Helen Budge, Shona Thompson and Marie Gordon. This review excludes caretakers and ASN auxiliaries and has been prompted by anomalies in hours of support available in different schools i.e. one school with 56 pupils receives 61 hours of support and another school with 57 pupils has 40 hours support.

Following the McCrone agreement reached in 2001 temporary additional funding was made available to local authorities to permit other members of staff to carry out duties that teachers were no longer expected to do i.e. supervision outside class contact time; dinner money, first aid, administration of medicines and other administration duties.

SINGLE STATUS

by Brian Smith, branch chair

The mass meeting in February, when 230 Unison members gathered in the Islesburgh Community Centre to discuss single status, was a great success.

Many people heard for the first time what the result of the job evaluation exercise to date might be - an attack both on pay and terms and conditions for former APT&C staff. Austin Taylor and Barry spoke about could happen: a big hit at members' pay, especially low-paid members, and a requirement for them to work an extra threea week.

Emma Phillips, attending on behalf of the union's regional office in Aberdeen, explained what view Unison nationally would take of such a deal: a dim view!

The meeting agreed unanimously to reject what seemed to be on offer so far.

Atsoo afterwards the management tasked to deal with single status showed that they had taken notice of the big mandate Unison's negotiators had received. They came forward with a new suggestion: that every employee should have preservation of current pay, if they were going to lose out in the job evaluation exercise, plus £1000 to compensate for the extra hours worked per week.

Unison nationally is looking at this offer, to see if it would be legal. Your branch committee has discussed it, and agrees that it should be considered. However, national officials and the branch also considering an alternative course of action: that the Council put more money into the annual wage bill to protect 'losers'. Watch this space!

Standing up to be counted

The pensions strike of the 28th March gave a clear message that union members would fight for the pension rights of local government workers. The picketing and rally was a chance to show solidarity, both with fellow UNISON members and with the other trade unionists who took part.



Heading for the rally



Members from all the unions gather for the march



Marchers smile through the drizzle



Detour: the march boards the Bressay ferry



Gathering at the Town Hall



The letter of protest is handed over to Convenor Sandy Cluness and Chief Executive Morgan Goodlad.

Why bother?

It's a post-Thatcher, complacent and selfish world: workers take their rights for granted and don't see why they should stick their neck out for anybody. Or is it? If that's so, why did so many union members, many of whom could ill-afford to lose a day's pay, still feel it was important to strike? Some of the members give their views.

Mary Stewart, aged 19, (below left) joined the picket at Hayfield House: *"I've only been a UNISON member for 2 months, I joined because I wanted a vote over the Single Status settlement. I didn't expect to be on strike so soon, but was in no doubt I had to come out - union members have a responsibility to stand together, and you shouldn't leave it to other folk to fight for your rights."*

Library worker Fiona Macdonald (below middle): *"The Rule of 85 change doesn't affect me personally, but of course you support the rights of your colleagues. I don't think they should mess with our pensions, as we work hard, do essential jobs and are not highly paid. They want to take away what little we have so that when we retire we fall into the poverty trap"*.



Sandra Gray (below right), also from the Library and a recent UNISON recruit: *"I just think your pension's important and if you join a union you should support any action to show the union has strength and a voice"*.

Kaila Tarrant and Tracey Leith (above, with children Max and Daisy) said: *"We are here to save our pensions and the pensions of your children!"*

Strike action was suspended on April 12th. This message went out to members:

Dear member

The solidarity by the joint unions on March 28, and the prospect of similar action in Scotland on 26 April, has achieved a breakthrough in the pensions dispute.

Talks will follow. We all hope that employers and government throughout the UK will now establish protection for LGPS members that mirrors that received by other public sector workers.

What has happened this week shows how essential it is that we have trade unions, so that the workforce as a whole can withstand attacks on our terms and conditions.

Many thanks to those who, since they were working for one reason or other on 28 March, have sent cheques for the hardship fund. We have also received cheques from teachers who supported our action. Anyone who still wants to contribute should send a cheque, payable to 'Unison Scotland', to the Unison Local Government Branch, 2 St Sunniva Street, Lerwick.

Brian Smith,
Branch chair

