

Unity

Devon County Unison
April 2003

"Activism is my rent for living on this planet"

Alice Walker in 'The Colour Purple'

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Dennis Bowles

It is with much sadness that I inform you all of the death of Dennis Bowles.

Dennis had recently been diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease and died peacefully in his sleep on the morning of 29th March.

Dennis was a long time member of the branch, and had worked tirelessly for many years as an Executive member until his retirement.

Following his retirement Dennis became Retired Members Secretary and continued the role for the best part of twenty years until this years AGM when he stood down because of his deteriorating health.

Dennis also served for many years on the Branch and Regional Welfare Committees, and represented the Branch for several years at the National Welfare AGM, again only standing down this year.

Dennis put in an incredible amount of time and effort on behalf of members and he is a great loss to the Branch.

A full obituary will be published in UNITY, and any contributions will be gratefully received.

Dennis's funeral was held at Exminster Parish Church on Thursday 3rd April.

Dave Parsons

Iraq

At the AGM, a motion was passed by those members present, that this branch did not support the unilateral action by the US and British governments in taking military action in Iraq.

As one can guess, this and subsequent actions has caused some controversy both within the members of the branch and elsewhere.

It should be remembered that differing views are essential to democracy and that dissent has played a significant role in shaping the institutions of UK society and continues to do so. This can be seen in the resignation of Robin Cook and the large vote against the role of the U.K. in Iraq. This dissent has strengthened the role of parliament in that the Prime Minister has had to come to parliament to explain his reasoning rather than act as though he is the first president of the UK.

The email controversy a members view

I was one of those who 'replied to all', when I thought I was answering just one person, plus the originator of the chain. So I started at the bottom and sent a quickie response to the first in my pile.

Quite a little fire-storm this brought down. Unfortunately, one was from Edward Chorlton, banning further traffic. So the following is what I would like to say to the 'outraged of Devon' who filled my Inbox. But my position is too junior and

precarious to go public and take the flak. So, for what it's worth, I pass it on to you, as you got this ball rolling.

*Firstly, what I wrote below is not "a matter of opinion", as many claimed, but is fact. Whether or not Bush and Blair are guilty of a crime, **staying silent** when you believe one has been committed **is a crime** - certainly in domestic law and is against the spirit, if not the letter, of international law.*

*Therefore it is a citizens **legal** duty to call attention to it.*

*Secondly, to those who object to war-protectors on the grounds that their loved are or have been in the front-line and we have no right to criticize the business in hand, I reject this argument totally. **I** didn't send the troops to Iraq. As far as I'm concerned they can come home now before there are any more casualties. This attempt to shut down debate is invalid (unless HMG bans protest under martial law). It makes out that 'our boys' are the only ones in danger or the only ones who don't deserve to be so. It can hardly come as a surprise to them that a lot of people disagree with this campaign, so protest is no more demoralising now than before.*

Thirdly, this was precisely the reaction that Bush and Blair were looking for to close down the objectors. So I am not attacking the Army but the politicians who sent them.

*Fourthly, for those who (virtually) screamed that they didn't want to hear any of these arguments - **there is no right of ignorance**. That was established over 50 years ago and it's something I hope is taught now in schools in this country*

The AGM - Were you there?

The AGM was held on the 6 March and if you weren't there here some more of the edited highlights. This was your opportunity to hear what is going on and express your opinion, please let your Union know what you want them to do about the above issues

Mileage allowance

The County Council has proposed the abandonment of the National Terms and Conditions (NJC) abolishing the distinction between essential and causal users imposing one fixed rate for all. This was rejected by the AGM who requested that the NJC terms be retained.

Parking charges

The council have indicated that they are considering the introduction of car parking charges at County Hall. They are to consult further on this and the views of the unions members are needed .

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE UNDER ATTACK

STAFF TRAVEL

Essential car users beware. The Council has been discussing proposals, which ask you to pay for the introduction of new travel allowances.

This could affect you dramatically. With some staff loosing up to £691 per year.

The Annual General Meeting voted to reject any proposals less than the National Joint Council (NJC) allowance rates.

Management were informed of our position at a meeting held on 24th March. They replied that they would consider amending their proposals.

Our clear message is that UNISON will not accept the imposition of new arrangements, which compromise the current conditions of service.

Unless the offer meets the NJC rates, we will be asking for the matter to go to dispute, for negotiation at Regional Council.

If the matter can not be resolved successfully, we will ballot for industrial action. Asking car users to withdraw the use of their cars for work purposes.

We feel this strategy would quickly result in the Council realising that they rely on car users to successfully deliver services to the public. Without the goodwill of our members the Council can not operate effectively.

As UNISON members we are asking you for your solidarity.

Remember that you have to fight to protect your conditions of service. If the council get away with this, where will they look next to make savings??

United we stand. Please support your Union.

New Code of Practice for contracts between local authorities and private companies.

UNISON nationally has succeeded in obtaining a commitment from the government to end the two-tier workforce in local government. When local authority service contracts are put out to private tender, new staff will receive pay and conditions which will be 'no less favourable overall than those of transferred staff. UNISON had rejected an earlier proposal for 'broadly comparable' pay and conditions as too ambiguous and open to abuse. Dave Prentis, UNISON General Secretary says, " I am confident that when it comes to competing on quality, the public sector will beat private-sector companies hands down and more contracts will return in-house." UNISON has secured a major victory over private companies, by ensuring that the code is enforceable rather than voluntary. In addition, private companies will have to provide pensions for new starters, who in the past have either not been given access to pension schemes or have simply been offered money purchase schemes, which are worth less than the local government final salary scheme.

Workplace Learning and Development.

Did you fill in your survey form and return it. Have you ever thought you would like to read better, not sweat at the sight of simple maths or feel more confident in the work you do? UNISON recognises the importance of learning opportunities and resources to the quality of our members' lives in the workplace and elsewhere.

This Branch is committed to make learning a part of work and to turn that learning to the advantage of our members and the services they provide. We are working with DCC to secure a Learning Partnership Agreement that will set out the principles necessary for the establishment of a working environment in order to promote Lifelong Learning.

We feel that members should be supported to undertake training especially those who have not traditionally had access to workplace learning and development or who have had a poor experience of formal education. Workers in this category are often in low paid part time jobs and are women. Included in this edition of UNITY is a member's survey, which I hope you can complete so that we can consider which courses would be most beneficial for you.

We work closely with the Worker's Educational Association (WEA) who delivers the courses for UNISON. Important new employment legislation allows reasonable time off for Lifelong Learning Advisors and Union Learning Reps. More of this in the next issue of UNITY.

If you would like to find out more about the work this Branch is doing to support Lifelong Learning then please contact me on Tel: 01392 468058, or via the Branch office on 01392 382530 or via DCC email.

BRANCH EDUCATION AND TRAINING SURVEY

To date there have been almost 100 returns of the questionnaires for this survey. Thank you to everyone who took the time to think about this and send in their forms. I shall be analysing them with colleagues and letting you know the results soon. The prize draw will be undertaken after March 31st.

This survey will be used to inform the work UNISON is doing with DCC regard to a Partnership Learning Agreement. This Agreement acknowledges the statutory right to time off for Union Lifelong Learning Representatives to undertake training and support to members in the workplace.

We want to achieve a working programme of union learning in partnership with DCC. To accompany this we hope to recruit a team of Union Learning Reps and Lifelong Learning Advisors who can support and help sustain members to take advantage of all the learning opportunities that exist. Some stewards have attended a pilot UNISON Lifelong Learning Rep's course already. If anyone is interested in this please contact me at the Branch office or via DCC email.

UNISON members should be able to feel supported by their employer to access appropriate training in their workplace for the jobs that they do. Nationally one in three workers say their employer has never offered them any training. Managers and professionals or those with a degree are up to five times more likely to receive training than people with no qualifications and/or in an unskilled job. DCC's own learning and development policy says:

"The Council is committed to supporting the development of all employees, to enable them to perform effectively in their current role and to develop to meet future challenges. Employees recognise their role in their own development process and work in partnership with their managers, Trade Union representatives and the Council to develop their knowledge, skills and potential.

The Council and its employees will strive to ensure learning and development becomes a lifelong process and an integral part of serving the people of Devon"

Did you know that 23% of the employed workforce in Devon have basic skill needs? With support from UNISON Regional Education Co-ordinator, Brenda Weston and Lifelong Learning Project Worker, Edna Warwick your Branch wants to encourage a consistent approach across

the County to encourage equality of access to learning and development and equality of treatment once accessed.

Rose Gander. Branch Education Co-ordinator
COURSES

The following courses will be held in Exeter and Plymouth starting on these dates:

Health & Safety Stage 1: 10 Wednesdays from 30th April 2003

Health & Safety Stage 2: 10 Tuesdays from 29th April 2003

TUC Occupational Health & Safety Certificate Courses in Exeter & Plymouth: starting on Friday 2 May 2003 for 36 weeks.

If any member would be interested in these courses please contact either Rose Gander, Education Co-ordinator, or Pauline Roberts Health & Safety Officer via DCC email or via the Branch office.

Computer Courses in Exeter & Plymouth:

Introduction to Computers for Trade Union Duties:

Exeter: 10 Thursdays from 1st May 2003.
Plymouth: 10 Fridays from 2 May 2003.

Computers and Collective Bargaining Application Skills:

Exeter: 10 Thursdays from 1 May 2003.
Plymouth: 10 Fridays from 2 May 2003.

Contact: Rose Gander as above for details.

New Unison Stewards Induction Training Day

As a New Unison Steward with very limited experience in the role I was delighted to have the opportunity to attend the recent Induction Training Day. The content of the day was excellent and it gave a clear overview of how things operate with the roles and responsibilities of Unison Officers from Regional and

Branch Level through to the actual Stewards.

It was great to meet many of the Branch Officers and to discuss various issues with them directly. We also had time to look at some mock case studies and to learn from each others knowledge and experience.

The officers facilitating the day were also excellent and the day moved along at a fair old pace. I really would recommend that any New Stewards take the opportunity to attend the next available Induction Day.

Above all it was fantastic to meet other stewards with such energy and enthusiasm and to realise you are not alone out there!

Stewart Gregson
Unison Steward
Devon Property

Rise in National Minimum Wage

The Government has accepted the Low Pay Commission's recommendations for the National Minimum Wage to rise to £4.50 an hour for adults and £3.80 for the youth rate. Patricia Hewitt also provisionally accepted a recommendation for further increases in October 2004 to £4.85 per hour for adults and £4.10 for the youth rate.

In response Brendan Barber, TUC General Secretary Elect, said: "The low paid will be disappointed that the Low Pay Commission has not accepted union calls for the minimum wage to be raised to £5 next year. The continuing evidence that the minimum wage has had little or no negative impact on employment would have justified such an increase.

"But the rise is still significantly above inflation, and the Low Pay Commission has made it clear that subsequent increases in the minimum wage should continue to be above inflation. This commits the employer representatives to a minimum wage strategy that will continue to bear down on poverty in work. The minimum wage and tax credits have

made a real difference to millions of the low paid. They remain a jewel in this Government's crown."

Training and Development Thoughts

I have the OU prospectus for Professional Development in Education, which may be of interest to Teaching Assistants. Contact me for details.

I also have the prospectus for the OU Openings courses. Did you know there are free places for people who are lone parents, have a disability or are from black and ethnic minority groups? One of these Openings courses you may be interested in is called 'Open to Change Y004'. This course focuses on how you can use the skills you have and the new skills you have acquired to make changes happen and cope positively with the effects of change on those around you. It is designed to help people who are thinking about returning to study. If you would like more information on any OU course you could ring the OU on 0117 925 6523. Or contact me on 468059 or via DCC email.

Rose Gander

Events

LOOKING FOR A CHANCE TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE?

WOMEN, WORK & SOCIETY – YOU CAN GAIN CONFIDENCE AND START LEARNING AGAIN WITH UNISON'S WOMEN'S LIVES COURSE. FREE TO ALL UNISON WOMEN MEMBERS IN THE SOUTHWEST.

This course is designed for women who are returning to study so joining is easy and sessions are informal and friendly with no tests or examinations.

Women's Lives deals with issues of interest to all women and helps develop existing skills and give you new ones. It focuses on women's experiences at work and in their personal lives.

If you wish you can gain credits for your work, which will help you access other courses and workplace training.

You join a regular study group which meets every two weeks. There is also a residential weekend. All the tutors on the course are women and your tutor will run the study group and help advise and give you feedback.

It is FREE to UNISON members including accommodation and meals for the weekend. You must be a paid up member to join the course but you don't have to be actively involved in the union.

Where: WEA Bradninch Hall, Exeter.

Contact: Hazel Vallance 03192 490970 or the UNISON regional Education Team, Taunton. 01823 288031

WEA Tutor: Chris Collier 01392 215193

Info Evening: Tuesday 1st April 7-9 p.m.
Study Groups: Tuesdays 7-9 p.m. 8 April, 6 & 20 May, 3 & 17 June, 1, 15, & 29 July

Residential w/e: April 26/27 in Exeter.

More Info: Rose Gander, UNISON DCC Branch, Education Co-ordinator, Branch office, Matford Buildings, County Hall, Exeter. Tel: 01392 382530 or 01392 468059
Email: rgander@devon.gov.uk

Lesbian & Gay Training

Day/Workshop - Saturday 12th April 2003, Albermarle Centre, Taunton. 10.00 - 4.00

Do you want to know more about becoming a Branch contact on Lesbian & Gay issues for your Branch? If the answer is YES to the above questions, then you are invited to this training day. You can contact in complete confidence our Lesbian & Gay officer via the Branch office or Jill Pearson, UNISON House, The Crescent, Taunton. TA1 4DU. 01823 288031. email: j.pearson@unison.co.uk or Mark Godfrey on mgodfreyunison@hotmail.com Or Rose Gander Branch Education Co-ordinator DCC email.

Women and the World Unite – International Women's Day Saturday 8th March at Richard Huish College in Taunton.

The event started with an opening address by Louise Richards the Chief Executive of War on Want. All the delegates agreed with her that the only war worth fighting for is the war on want throughout the world. War on Want mainly work in developing countries but their projects are facilitated by War on Want rather than run by the staff. Local people initiate and run the projects which in turn improves the success of projects

I attended the delicious workshop by Julie Cooper from the Somerset Fair Trade Network in the morning. This session was enthusiastically participated in as we had a chance to sample Fair Trade products eg, chocolate, bananas, tea or coffee. I have switched my buying habits since watching the video.

A good lunch was provided at the college and afterwards, Andrew and Michael, my youngsters, enjoyed jumping in the puddles outside more than they enjoyed the musical accompaniment - but that doesn't surprise me.

The afternoon workshop was also thought-provoking for me. Gloria Miqueles from the Women's Environmental Network got all the women to conduct a toxic tour of our bathroom cabinets. It all added up to a shocking amount of potentially harmful chemicals which we were all happily applying to our skin on a daily basis. The web site at www.wen.org.uk identifies some of the chemicals to look out for on the ingredients lists of shampoos, conditioners, moisturisers, and make-up products.

I would thoroughly recommend any women considering going on a such an event organised by UNISON to just give it a go. Not only was a crèche provided for my children but there was a lunch on offer too. I found the atmosphere friendly and would certainly go on another local event when I get the chance. I came back from the event feeling refreshed but keen to change a few things to improve the life of my family and the lives of families in other countries. Most of all it made me think.

The event itself was well thought out to find something that would appeal to nearly every woman attending.

Sim Taylor

Child Care Sub Group Update

Your Branch has been at the forefront of talks with the employer concerning the unacceptable stress caused to members who are undertaking this award programme. Andy Stapley, Dave Musk, Rod Ballard and Rose Gander have recently met with Liz Hitchens, Liz Curry and Nigel Stoppard. Following research and consultation with members, issues of concern were raised including caseload cover, time off for study, impact on team colleagues, academic leadership, recognition of achievement, attitude of managers, provision for part time staff and more. For more details please contact any members of the sub group via the Branch office or DCC email.

The meeting was helpful and positive and there was acknowledgement of the stress and difficulties for members with undertaking the Child Care Award in its present form. **All those members who have contacted us have made an impact on the future presentation and organisation of the Child Care Award in Devon.**

UNISON nationally has urged TOPSS England (Training Organisation for the Personal Social Services) to revise its guidance that employees should contribute 15% of the cost of qualification training. (The 15% has been calculated on the value of personal time committed to training and is in urgent need of revision) It was interesting to note that our own concerns have been mirrored by the GSCC who recently undertook an inspection visit, triggered by the lack of successful candidates. It looks like the Programme, which administers the award, will be relocated to a single provider although it is not known yet who that will be. **There is no doubt that our members have made a valuable contribution by highlighting relevant issues as agreed by both the employer and the GSCC.** There is talk now of a fresh start and it has been agreed that your Branch will be a constructive part of

this. A new Child Care Award Steering Group will be established and your representatives will play an active role.

Please continue to keep us informed of your experiences both positive and negative via your stewards or to the sub group direct. **Only through your involvement can UNISON work to improve the delivery of the Child Care Award and promote the interests of members.** Training and development should be seen by managers and members as a positive and valuable experience which increases job satisfaction and service to children.

United to Stop the BNP

Branch Executive has been increasingly concerned by the activities of the BNP in Devon and on 26 March accordingly approved the following motion:-
Devon County Unison notes and is deeply concerned by the decision of the British National Party (BNP) to field candidates in the forthcoming local council elections. The Branch fully endorses the Unity Statement produced by the United to Stop the BNP Campaign and will actively support the Campaign.
The Branch therefore RESOLVES:-
to affiliate to the United to Stop the BNP Campaign;
to distribute the Unity Statement to every member of the Devon County Branch; and
to refer this matter to Regional Council recommending affiliation and similar distribution to all members by both Region and each individual Unison Branch in the South West.

The Unity Statement of the United to Stop the BNP Campaign is as follows:-

Unity Statement:

We acknowledge that in June 2002, at a meeting held in Newton Abbot, attended by Nick Griffin, the leader of the British National Party, the BNP declared their intention to draw a political line from Bristol to Bournemouth and to make the

South West a 'multi-cultural free zone'. We recognise that such a declaration represents an extremist ideology akin to that of 'white supremacy' and consistent with an intention to engage in a process of 'ethnic cleansing'.

We are deeply concerned that the British National Party (BNP) intends to spread its 'agenda of race-hate' in the South West, by fielding candidates in the forthcoming local council elections on May 1st. We vehemently oppose the BNP's attempt to use the politics of racial hatred for electoral advantage.

We believe that the politics of right-wing extremists poses a serious threat to our basic democratic values. We believe that the presence of the BNP represents a serious risk to the social, cultural and economic well being of local communities and the South West region as a whole. We believe that the BNP will actively seek to undermine our good community race relations and that their activities will result in increased in hostility and racist incidents against minority ethnic people in the South West.

We stand with the vast majority of voters in the South West who, we believe, do not share the vision of the right wing extremists and we call on all voters to stop the BNP. We are committed to the widest possible unity against the BNP and their attempts to whip up racism, hatred and division in local communities.

We call on those who support a society based on diversity, equality, respect and justice to unite against the BNP. We draw the same line between Bristol and Bournemouth and call on all people in the South West to work together to keep our region a 'nazi-free zone'

The UNITED TO STOP THE BNP Campaign is a broad based, non-sectarian coalition of people and anti-racist networks drawn from local communities, trades unions, faith groups and community organisations, and formed to defeat the BNP in its attempts to win seats on our local councils. Support for the campaign is welcomed from any individual or organisation, which agrees with this statement and shares this aim.

To join/support the UNITED TO STOP THE BNP Campaign and to be kept informed of future activities, particularly in those areas where the BNP are fielding candidates in the local council elections, please fill in your details below and return via email to: ncrmsouthwest@aol.com

Quote from Lord Laming in the Summary & Recommendations: The Victoria Climbié Enquiry

"Credit should be given to both UNISON and the Police Federation for the support they gave to front-line staff who gave evidence to this Inquiry"..

Alternative versions

If any member with special needs would like a copy of Unity in an alternative format e.g. large print, audio cassette or on floppy disc please feel free to contact the Branch office.

Tailpiece and Welcome

What another issue, It is intended to publish at least every two months and more often if required.

Contributions are welcome in electronic form if possible (my typing is very slow and the spelling a little erratic). They should be sent to the Union Office at County Hall.