

SBMG News



Scottish Black Members Group of UNISON

Spring 2009 Newsletter

Chair's Message



Dear Readers

The Spring Edition of our Newsletter has reached you at a time when we need your votes.

The BNP only needs 4% in votes; it is much easier for BNP, to get the required vote, when turn out is low at European elections. We need to cast our votes in the elections, to keep the BNP out of Scotland, and more importantly out of the European Parliament.

We welcome the publication of the Equality Bill. We hope the bill will address the Equal Pay issue and we will keep you posted as the Bill goes through the Parliament.

News from STUC Congress: Mike Kirby's report and Scottish International Seminar sets challenges for us to encourage Black Workers to join a trade union and support the UNISON position on Israel. Consider twinning our branches with sister trade unions, and influence politicians to support the overseas trade union work.

Best Wishes,
Hamid Rasheed

USE YOUR VOTE



EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 4TH JUNE



UNISON, Scotland's largest public service union launched its manifesto for the forthcoming European Union (EU) parliamentary elections earlier this month. The document calls for the EU to take a lead in tackling racism across Europe.

UNISON Scottish Convenor Mike Kirby said "We have seen recent attempts by the far-right to turn genuine job grievances into attacks on migrant workers, and we know how they can exploit fears in a recession. The EU needs to ensure they tackle this racism, and UNISON Scotland will be campaigning strongly against the BNP and other ultra right organisations wherever and whenever they seek to peddle their lies."

The British National Party is aiming to win at least one seat in the European parliament. We can stop that happening. We must be on our guard and fight against the politics of hate and challenge the lies that they spread. The BNP is trying to make capital out of people's fears over jobs, housing and immigration. It is even attacking public service workers for demanding fair pay for delivering the services that our communities rely on. It is a UNISON priority to stop the racist party winning any seats in the 4 June elections.

Trade unions have always fought for freedom, equality and tolerance. The BNP stands against all these values. Let's show everyone what UNISON members are made of. Use your vote and help us kick the BNP out of Europe.

www.unison-scotland.org.uk/revitalise/euomanifesto09.pdf

Mike Reports On STUC Delegation Visit To Israel And Palestine

Scottish Convenor, Mike Kirby in his three part presentation at the Scottish International Seminar gave a moving audio visual account of the STUC delegation's recent visit to Israel and Palestine, to explore the merits for Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions against the state of Israel until it complies with international law and agreed human rights principles. The 11 member STUC delegation during their visit met ministers, communities, trade unions, and human rights groups on both sides

Mike informed the forum that we observed a greater sense of order in the Palestine-controlled cities of Nablus and Ramala. We also visited the Israeli border town of Sderot, to observe the impact of Kassam rockets on Israeli lives. We also observed how Palestinian communities have been split by the wall Israel has built to ensure their security.

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JOIN A UNION

The Scottish Trades Union (STUC) is to develop a Scotland wide campaign to encourage black workers, including migrants, asylum seekers and refugee workers, to take up trade union membership.

Backing the call from the STUC Black Workers' Conference, UNISON delegate Ravi Nathan (SBMC) told the Congress, "We all need to be a part of making this change. We must be prepared to take on the mantle of leadership".

"Black and white workers are concerned about the same issues but Black workers are disproportionately affected", added Ravi.

"Inequality is deeply embedded in workplaces. We must make sure that these types of issues become key parts of the mainstream work of our union".

Ravi stressed that UNISON had already started the work by producing its 'challenging racism in the workplace' toolkit and a toolkit to support Black workers in becoming activists.

The STUC Black Workers' Committee will engage with groups like 'Black Vote' and others to encourage political awareness among Black trade unionists. A report on the campaign's progress will come to the 2010 Congress.

SCOTTISH HELP FOR MOTHERS TO BE IN MALAWI

The International Development Secretary, Douglas Alexander made a pledge to increase support for Oxfam health programme in Malawi, with an additional £9 million increase in the (DFID) funding to tackle a serious maternal mortality problem in Malawi. As a country Malawi enjoys a special relationship with the people of Scotland. The announcement was made recently, at an Oxfam event, which took place at Glasgow University.

A £9 million increase in the (DFID) funding brings the total UK commitment to health care in Malawi to £109 million from 2005 until 2011 and cements the UK's position as the largest health donor in the country.

Oxfam are currently running a Public Health First Campaign working with the trade union UNISON, looking at the benefits of public healthcare in the developing world. DFID and Oxfam work very closely in Malawi and across the world helping to improve access to free maternal and child health care.

Oxfam is campaigning to raise awareness on the issue of 1,400 women dying needlessly in pregnancy and child birth.

The International Development Secretary, Douglas Alexander said: "The Department for International Development is currently in the consultation period for its new White Paper which will outline its development priorities for the next few years". If you would like to contribute to this process, log on to: www.dfid.gov.uk/Getting-Involved/

Mike's Report ...

Mike stated, after seeking views on Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel from a number of groups and interested parties, the STUC have taken a position to support the BDS against Israel and encourage positive investment in the occupied territories, and informed the delegates that the issue is open for discussion.

In response to a question on the UNISON Scotland position on BDS, Mike Kirby said: "As an affiliate of the STUC, UNISON Scotland's position on boycott, divestments and sanctions against Israel, and encouraging positive investments in occupied Palestinian territories, is very clear."

"We support the BDS and would like to ensure that our decision does not impact detrimentally upon communities in Scotland, particularly Jewish people who rely on 'Kosher products'."

At the seminar, UNISON Scotland's relationship with Histadrut was questioned. In response, Mike Kirby said: "The continued occupation of Palestinian land, with 67 border check points has made the two state solutions a question mark. However, we believe our engagement with both PGFTU and Histadrut is vital to make progress on the trade union work done so far, in the Middle East".

UNISON's New Venture

UNISON and the new Nursing Times (NT) have formed a unique partnership to expand and enhance the range of services and information available to the union's nursing members. The link to UNISON / NT website is: www.nursingtimes.net/whats-new-in-nursing/unison/

New Equality Bill

UNISON has welcomed the Government's commitment to tackle inequality and discrimination in the Equality Bill that was published on 27 April 2009, but want action to toughen up equal pay legislation. UNISON Director of Organising and Membership, Bronwyn McKenna, said: "UNISON welcomes the Government's commitment to promote equality, fairness and tackle discrimination in our society, especially in these difficult times. It is only right that where public money is being spent, inequalities should not be allowed to exist."

"We hope the Bill will help to end the injustice of unequal pay for women. Tough new legislation is needed, as almost 40 years after the Equal Pay Act, women still get paid 17% less than men. It will be a missed opportunity for women if the Government does not take this chance to overhaul current laws and introduce tough new powers of enforcement." The Equality Bill is expected to come in to force from Autumn 2010.

www.equalities.gov.uk/equality_bill.aspx



Mike Kirby with delegates at the Scottish International Seminar

It's Time To Influence Politicians

The Scottish International Seminar highlighted the challenges ahead for UNISON Scotland's International work, with a clear message: "It's time to influence the politicians, to ensure a steady progress on the work which has been done so far with sister trade unions overseas".

The seminar kicked-off with a presentation by Bill Butler MSP – Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Cuba. Bill spoke on the success of the Cuban revolution. Bill described the Cuban system which has resulted in low unemployment, high literacy & numeracy and an excellent health service, all of which we can learn from.

Mark Kiehlmann an Oxfam campaigner shared his experiences on joint campaigning with Oxfam and what we can learn from NGO. Mark's presentation included a video clip on "Pregnant Women Break Dancing in Paisley". The break dancing was part of Oxfam campaign to raise awareness that every day 1,400 women die needlessly in pregnancy and child birth.

Scottish Convenor Mike Kirby's three part presentation included a report, a DVD and discussion on the STUC delegation's recent visit to Israel and Palestine, to ascertain the merits for Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions against the state of Israel. (Full story is included in this edition).

Sam Macartney gave a humbling account on the UNISON delegation's recent visit to South Africa, Swaziland, and Malawi, to explore health, water and other public services and the work of trade unions in these countries. Sam clearly identified the need for us to support sister trade unions in Africa.

The seminar helped delegates to build their awareness of the need for joint working with sister trade unions, and to influence the politicians to avoid aid cuts on the work of Trade Unions / NGO in Africa and the Middle-East.

Editor's Corner

Lui Giacomello

The spring 2009 edition of SBMG News contains news of the forthcoming National Executive Committee (NEC) ballot.

Most NEC members represent either regions or service groups. In addition there is a young member's seat. There are also additional national seats, including four for black members and one reserved for a low-paid female member.

The more members that vote in the NEC elections the more representative our union is. Play your part, use your vote!

Lui Giacomello is an IT Network Engineer with NHS Lothian.

USE YOUR VOTE- NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

Ballot Closes 15 May
2009 at 5pm

You have received the ballot papers for the National Executive Committee (NEC) elections. On the ballot paper you will see the name of other candidates contesting NEC elections.

Please cast your vote using your democratic right, and get counted. If you have not yet received a ballot paper, please phone the election helpline on 0845 355 0845.

The lines will be open from 6am to midnight, Monday to Friday and 9am to 4pm on Saturday. The text phone number is 0800 0 967 968.

www.unison.org.uk/elections/nec/elections.asp



Palestinian Workers In Israel To Lose Jobs - International Appeal

In March 2009, Israel Railways, a state-owned company, launched a new policy denying employment to railroad crossing guards who have not served in the Israeli army.

As Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel are exempt from obligatory army service this policy will clearly have discriminatory consequences and could lead to the lay-off of approximately 150 Arab railway workers who monitor and maintain Israel's level crossings. Israel Railways explicitly stated that the new employment policy is designed to give priority to young army veterans.

There is growing international disquiet at the introduction of this policy, and UNISON has lent its voice to the calls for the policy to be withdrawn stating that it 'contradicts the fundamental rights of workers to equality and non-discrimination in employment, and is also in contravention of ILO conventions'.

Add your voice calling on Israel Railways to repeal discriminatory policy at:
www.laborers-voice.org

BURMA CAMPAIGN UK

www.burmacampaign.org.uk

A global signature campaign has been launched demanding the release all of Burma's political prisoners. The campaign is being led by former political prisoners from Burma and over 160 Burma exile and solidarity groups in 24 countries are taking part.

The campaign aims to collect 888,888 signatures before 24 May 2009, the legal date that Burma's democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi should be released from house arrest.

The target of 888,888 signatures symbolises 8.8.88, the day the junta massacred some 3,000 people who courageously protested in Burma's largest democracy uprising.

The petition calls on the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to make it his personal priority to secure the release of all political prisoners in Burma, as the essential first step towards democracy in the country.

We need your help to reach our target. Please sign the petition now:
www.burmacampaign.org.uk/fbppn.htm

There are over 2,100 political prisoners in Burma. They have committed no crime. They have been imprisoned for peacefully calling for democracy and freedom in Burma. In prison, democracy activists face horrific torture, including electric shocks, rape, iron rods rubbed on their shins until the flesh rubs off, severe beatings and solitary confinement. Many prisoners are kept in their cells 24 hours a day, given inadequate food and are in poor health. However, the regime appears to be systematically denying medical treatment to political prisoners.

Labour activists are among those targeted and imprisoned by the regime. Activists like Zaw Htay, who was jailed for 10 years in January for helping farmers file a report to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on land seized by the army.

Prominent labour rights activist Su Su Nway was sentenced to 12 ½ years in prison for participating in the 2007 democracy uprising. We have just heard that her health is deteriorating and she has been admitted to hospital.

These brave men and women are at the forefront of the fight for freedom and democracy in Burma. They need your help.

Sign the petition now!
www.burmacampaign.org.uk/fbppn.htm

Scottish Trade Unions Call for Boycott of Israel

The Scottish Trades Union Congress in Perth, backed boycotts and disinvestment, and called for sanctions against the state of Israel because of the state's failure to comply with international laws and agreed principles of human rights. Following extensive debate and deliberation, the Scottish trade unions have endorsed a report recommending the STUC support a boycott and disinvest from Israeli companies, call for sanctions against Israel, and encourage positive investments in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Speaking after the debate at the Congress, STUC General Secretary, Grahame Smith, said: "The STUC is deeply concerned at the daily violations of human rights experienced by Palestinian people. The decision taken by our Congress is not a knee jerk reaction, but arrived at after careful consideration over a two year period. During this time the STUC engaged in discussions with interested groups in Scotland and the UK, and undertook a fact finding delegation to Israel and Palestine". Mr Smith added "by taking this decision, the STUC intends to campaign for economic, political and social pressure to be brought upon the Israeli Government, and world powers, to reach a peaceful and just two state solution for Palestine and Israel".