Politicians must be bold in opposing austerity

The STUC backed a UNISON and GMB 10 point plan for decent public services as a key to ‘reducing poverty and economic inequality.’ UNISON’s Stephen Smellie told delegates there was a broad political consensus in Scotland against austerity but words were not enough.

“We must insist that Scottish politicians can’t hide behind the ‘it’s all the fault of the Tories and we can’t do anything about it’ line. That was never good enough when the Scottish parliament had few powers to tackle austerity. It is even less acceptable now that the parliament has significant powers that it can choose to use.”

“UNISON’s publication ‘Combating Austerity’ spells out the steps that councils and the government can take”, he said commending it to MSPs and councillors.

Stephen slammed the 40,000 council job cuts and called for no compulsory redundancies. Politicians need to use existing and future taxation powers of the Scottish Parliament to oppose austerity and create prosperity.

“And in that light it is very welcome that Labour has drawn the conclusion that we drew years ago – we need to increase taxes, especially on the rich, to fund the level of services that the people of Scotland want. “We need politicians to be creative, be bold and who will work with us to oppose austerity”, said Stephen.

The motion called on politicians to oppose the cuts rather than passively administering them by investing in services and getting out of costly PFI schemes.

Staff skills should be recognised with decent pay and conditions along with raising powers and a fair local property tax”, said Stephen.

“We have argued for an end to the Council Tax freeze from before it was implemented and so it is good to see the government finally say that it will end – but not till next year and only so they can direct councils how to spend the revenue raised. It is a start but not good enough.”

Further strike as Glasgow jannies fight on

As we went to press, janitors in Glasgow schools were set to embark on another full week of strike action in their fight for parity of conditions with other workers.

The STUC Congress in April gave unanimous backing to an emergency motion supporting UNISON’s #Justice4Jannies campaign as they began their three-day strike at the time.

The jannies packed the gallery as delegates stood to applaud them.

The jannies’ employer, Cordia, is refusing to pay a working context and demands payment (WCD) to school janitors and is using spurious arguments to justify not making the payment. Glasgow City Council and its ALEOs’ pay structure awards payments to workers who undertake duties which are dirty, unpleasant, involve working outside on a regular basis or heavy lifting.

STUC to Congratulate Glasgow CCTV Staff

The STUC is to launch a campaign promoting the employment rights the EU has delivered for working people and will oppose attempts to ‘water down the benefits of a Social Europe.’

When UNISON consulted its members, 95% of them said that the EU was very important to them and two subjects above all were their priorities – public services and workers’ rights.

“That is why UNISON will be recommending a vote to remain in the EU”, said Gordon, but he warned: “Let us be clear about what we are not supporting.

“It is not the EU of Cameron’s Tories, it is not the EU of austerity, it is not the EU of undemocratic unaccountability. “UNISON will work to amend and reform the EU. We want to see a fair and social Europe. As trade unionists we want a Europe that protects workers. We do that by working with our brothers and sisters throughout Europe. We do it by working with our political allies, not by walking away from our friends.

“A Social Europe has made a real difference to people’s lives”, said Gordon.

After the referendum there will still be a Tory government who, “however much they whine and rant, will still be forced by the EU to maintain social and employment rights on annual leave, maternity and paternity leave, equal pay for work of equal value, agency workers and working time.”

But, out of the EU, the Tories would “bundle these rights together on a funeral pyre and set them alight.”

United wins call to defend human rights

UNISON Scotland convener Lilian Macer won STUC Congress support for UNISON’s call for a campaign against the repeal of the Human Rights Act.

The motion condemned the UK Government for its many direct and indirect attacks on human rights, including the Tile the Union Bill, the proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act and its failure to implement its equality and human rights obligations under EU and UN equality and human rights instruments.

Lilian said: “Trade unionists know that equality and social justice and a human rights agenda is intrinsic to achieving the socially just and fairer Scotland we strive for.”

Colombia

Lilian cautioned Congress about what life looks like without human rights. She said: “In December as part of a UNISON delegation to Colombia I witnessed first-hand human rights violations, the violence and abuses against trade unions, social movements and civil society organisations, on a level that shocked and disgusted our delegation.

“We heard testimonies from sisters and brothers in the trade union movement who live in fear of their lives on a daily basis for organising working people – doing what you and I do every day – for standing up for fair work, equality and human rights.”

STUC congratulates Glasgow CCTV staff

The STUC Congress sent congratulations to Glasgow CCTV UNISON members who have won a deal bringing up to a 24% pay rise, after twelve days of strike action over six weeks.

The 19 UNISON members took the action over the employer’s failure to pay shift allowances. Pending a new pay structure, workers will get an interim shift payment of £4,000 per year, backdated to January.
The results of 5 May elections show us that 21st century post-industrial politics is a disaggregated kingdom. These are islands of political diversity, and a new politics to match. The UK affiliations are creaking.

In Scotland, we’ve repeated a vote for a marked and established change and a political ascendency which the trade union movement must recognise. While we’ve known how to deal with variable political outcomes particularly in local government, our members, as a substantial part of the electorate in Scotland, have given us a clear steer on who we should work with in the future.

The SNP has swept Holyrood, with the Tories pushing Labour into third place. A strong Green surge put a pro-independence majority in place, despite the SNP’s failure to win a majority.

A crashing defeat for a party which dominated politics in Scotland and was established by the trade unions in 1997, Jeremy Corbyn said, “... we should reflect, the leadership of the party should reflect, find a way of finding a strategy and a narrative that changes the perception of the UK Labour Party across the United Kingdom so that we can go on and have a real shot at winning in 2020.”

Labour lost in Scotland because progressive cultural nationalism has gained momentum both since the referendum of 2014 and the UK general election of 2015. Scottish politics have polarised between a project of progressive independence and conservative unionism.

Labour is trapped in the middle, and needs to decide which side it’s on. Meanwhile it looks like some of unionist vote has now switched to the Tories.

The Scottish Labour Party will now push for a more radical Home Rule offer, with a federal Britain and a federal Labour party, but will this be enough?

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Zero hours – bad for workers, services and economy

The STUC will press the Scottish Government to work with trade unions to tackle the rise in zero hours contracts and casualised labour.

UNISON young member Bernadette Lafferty told delegates that she had personal experience of working a job that had no defined hours and was paid the minimum wage.

“It meant that I was unable to live independently and struggled to afford basic necessities whenever I failed to get a decent amount of hours.”

“This is a real big way on my life because it meant I had no opportunity to go to college and develop a career or to get a more stable working life.”

Bernadette told delegates that there are many more people out there who have been denied the same opportunities.

“It’s up to us in the trade union movement to support them as our union has done.”

Call for total opposition to TTIP ‘dodgy trade deals’

Pat Rowland won STUC backing for a UNISON motion to campaign for total opposition to TTIP (Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership) in the Scottish, UK and European Parliaments.

If TTIP goes through, it will allow multinational corporations to sue governments if their policies negatively affect profits, using what Pat called the “sinister” Investor-State Dispute Settlement system (ISDS).

It will make it harder to regulate private companies providing services and could prevent future governments bringing public services like the NHS, higher education, and others back in house.

“It’s a threat to workers’ rights such as health and safety, maternity rights, working time directive and environmental and climate change issues and many more,” warned Pat.

British union’s strict controls over development of drugs through clinical trials could also be undermined under the ISDS agreements.

The Conference demanded sign up to the living wage and end zero hours contracts.

“The campaign is crucial because currently only Scottish Labour opposes TTIP outright.”

UK Health Conference backs Scotland on pay, training, bursaries and more...

S

The Conference backed Scotland on pay, training, bursaries and more...

Cuts to emergency services put staff and communities at risk

T

The STUC will press the Scottish Government to adequately fund the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and to properly staff their control rooms, currently being cut from eight to three.

UNISON’s George McIvorine said: “It’s unrealistic that a modern ‘Best Value’ Police and Fire Service can be funded and built with such poor strategic planning, cuts to budgets and on such demanding timelines.

Give disabled young people the chance they deserve

D

Disabled young people are massively under-represented in apprenticeships and Congress delegates backed a wide-ranging campaign to address the difficulties they face.

The STUC is calling for an “Equal Opportunities Employer Scheme” to provide accreditation for equal pay employers.

UK Health Conference backs Scotland on pay, training, bursaries and more...
The STUC will call for an independent inquiry into PFI/PPP funding models for public sector building work, as well as into Edinburgh schools contracts which has led to such disruption for pupils, families and staff.

Seconding an emergency motion from the EIS, UNISON's Susan Kennedy told delegates that the issues raised around PPP by what has happened in Edinburgh go well beyond a single project and call into question the whole funding model in the past and in plans for the future.

PFIs, PPPs and the current government’s Non Profit Distributors (NPDs) “are all different names for the same problem,” Susan said. “They are all flawed and we need them all investigated.”

She called for politicians to take the opportunity of historic low borrowing rates on capital to refinance or bring back these schemes into the public sector to provide better value for public money.

“UNISON has been one of the strongest campaigners against public private finance – investigate and bring back in-house,” Susan added.

Support for young disabled people

Did you know that 12.5% of Scottish young people have a disability as defined under the Equalities Act 2010?

Disabled young people face many challenges throughout their daily lives, which UNISON and other bodies fully recognise and are currently working hard on to address.

The recent STUC congress backed a motion on providing more employment opportunities for these people, specifically around the Modern Apprenticeship programme where just 0.41% of places are taken up by those with disabilities.

Scotland has a significantly higher rate of unemployment amongst young disabled people at 58% compared to 20% of non-disabled people, and the average of 48% of young disabled people out of work across the whole of the EU.

Attainment for young people with disabilities is significantly lower than those without. A recent FCI report by UNISON’s disabled members committee revealed that only 63% of young people with disabilities attain a pass at GCSE level 5 or better (the equivalent of a NaS) compared to 89% of those without a disability.

This will further be worsened by a 8.38% drop in classroom assistants across Scotland, with three councils completely removing social support. Furthermore, many pupils with disabilities experience bullying in school, which will hamper their progress further.

Disabled young members are also represented on the National Disabled Members committee, by two representatives from the National Disabled Members committee. At last year’s disabled members conference, the committee successfully carried two motions, one about disabled workers being unaware of their legal rights and also on receipt of reasonable adjustments to undertake their work.

We want to hear your news

STUC is your paper; we want to hear your stories. John Stevenson (Editor) 0131 558 7488, john.stevenson@unison-edinburgh.org.uk

Safer learning and end to homophobia

The STUC backed the TIE Time for Inclusive Education campaign which is committed to inclusive education, tackling homophobia and creating a safer learning environment for all regardless of sexual orientation, gender or identity.

It has already donated £1,000 to this very important campaign for our young people.

UNISON’s Willie Docherty spoke in support.

To the horror of many delegates he spoke of the experience of a former colleague who experienced homophobic bullying at school.

Willie said, “On one occasion, when the bullying became violent he went to the school nurse and she told him that if he didn’t say so, he wouldn’t get into these situations.”

He added that “the shocking fact is that in Scotland, 28% of LGBT school students have attempted suicide at least once, and 50% of them are regularly self-harming.”

“A nation we should be ashamed of these statistics.”

STUC health and safety award for UNISON’s Scott Donohoe

Scott Donohoe, UNISON Scotland health and safety chair, has been presented with this year’s STUC Frank Maguire Award for Health and Safety.

Scott has been health and safety officer for Glasgow City UNISON for 14 years and is seconded from his employer, Glasgow City Council. He is passionate about health and safety, an interest that has seen him play a leading role in his union’s work on health and safety as well as participating in the Hazards movement in Scotland, the United Kingdom and Europe in his own time.

Graham Smith, STUC General Secretary said: “Scott Donohoe is an outstanding example of the difference trade union members can make in delivering safer and healthier workplaces. However, in Scott’s case he takes it a step further, playing a leading role in the Hazards movement at home and abroad.”

“Scott ensures that he supports UNISON health and safety representatives in Glasgow City Council developing campaign helping UNISON organise around health and safety, such as his work to protect workers and seek trade union recognition in the SECC using health and safety failures as leverage to recruit and grow membership.”

On receiving the award, Scott spoke of the respect for the late Frank Maguire of Thompson Solicitors who the award commemorates.

Climate Day – Lining up for a low carbon Scotland

Trade unionists lined up for a ‘Just transition’ on Climate Day at the UNISON Scotland and Stop Climate Chaos Scotland Fringe Meeting at the STUC.

The meeting was chaired by UNISON’s Stephen Smellie, and speakers included Stephen Boyd, STUC, Cheryl Gedling, PCS, and Mike Robinson, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland.

Climate Day is an international day of action for climate justice, and the event was a chance to celebrate progress and recommit to the fight for a sustainable future. The meeting discussed the issues facing workers and communities in the transition to a low carbon economy, and the need for a just transition where workers are not left behind.

Climate Day is an event that brings together workers, trade unionists and allies to demand a green and inclusive recovery. The event was an opportunity to highlight the intersectional impacts of the climate crisis and the urgent need for systemic change. The meeting also discussed the role of trade unions in supporting workers in the transition to a low carbon economy, and the importance of ensuring that the transition is just and equitable.

STUC backs progressive movements in South America

The STUC sent out a clear message that we should be backing democratically elected governments in South America against a ‘corporate-wealth’ right wing backlash.

Moving UNISON’s emergency motion, Sam Macartney told delegates: “Over the last couple of decades we have seen huge advances for working people in South America. Gains made in Bolivia, Argentina, Nicaragua, Ecuador and of course Chavez’s victory in Venezuela brought policies that benefited the workers and peasants and had huge popular support. These gains are now under threat. The right is making a comeback,” warned Sam.

Weed control: a new contractors manual

R. Carleton & T. Parker

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