We must put our services at centre of this election

The Tories want this election to be all about delivering a large mandate for Brexit negotiations. The Prime Minister has called this election to seek a mandate for her misguided hard Brexit strategy. Having ruled out the possibility of an election, and despite a commitment that the Parliament would run its full legal term until 2020, she has instigated a cynical and tactical U-turn. Her objective is to take advantage of the current political climate to seek an increase in the Conservatives’ UK parliamentary majority and to free her government from scrutiny over the difficult questions that will inevitably arise during the negotiations with the EU.

The stage has been set for a single issue election, the narrow agenda - so that it is not just fought on the Tories’ favoured turf. The campaign gives us an opportunity to keep cuts to public services at the top of the political agenda - so that it is not just fought on the Tories’ favoured turf.

This election cannot be allowed to become a rerun of the EU referendum. Nor can it be a dress rehearsal for any future Scottish independence vote.

It is important that every member participates in the ballot to maximise the ballot return.

Mark Ferguson, chair of the committee, said: “Members have sent a clear message to say they have had enough of years of below inflation pay rises.”

Members of Unite and GMB have accepted the offer, however the number of UNISON members rejecting the offer exceeds the total combined local government membership of these unions. Dougie Black, UNISON lead negotiator, said: “UNISON will continue to fight for fair pay, putting our members at the heart of the campaign.

“The Tory Trade Union Act designed to make it more difficult for workers to exercise their right to withdraw their labour cannot succeed. It is important that every member participates in the ballot to maximise the ballot return.”

The ballot, running from 11-30 May, will have to be postal because the law prevents the union from carrying out any ballot online.

Dougie said: “With their pay worth less now than it was 10 years ago, council workers have seen living standards squeezed as food, fuel, travel and childcare costs rise. “The employers’ offer falls far short of our claim.”

Let’s make sure we all get a vote

Remind your friends to check that they’re registered to vote in this general election. It’s vital for our public services.

You’d be surprised how many young people are missing from the UK electoral register and less than half of 18 to 24 year olds turn out to vote. You might find your friends are not registered, so let them know how to do it.

It only takes two minutes, and you can register at https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote?

Everyone has the right to be involved in the democratic process, let’s make sure no one is denied a voice in the election come 8 June. We have until 22 May to do this.

Council workers urged to vote for action on pay

UNISON members are being urged to reject the local government pay offer in their first full industrial action ballot under new government restrictions.

UNISON’s Scottish Local Government Committee is urging members to vote ‘yes’ for a programme of industrial action.

This follows one of the highest returns in a full membership online consultation where members voted overwhelmingly by 77.6% to 22.4% to reject the employers’ offer.

This election should be about

Positive, progressive, outward looking policies that support the interests of working people.

Investing in our NHS and all of our public services - keeping them public.

Fair taxation, fair work, rights and decent living standards for all.

Let’s put our services at centre of this election

We must put our services at centre of this election

This election cannot be allowed to become a rerun of the EU referendum. Nor can it be a dress rehearsal for any future Scottish independence vote.

The focus of this election should be on the disastrous policies of the current government and its immediate predecessor - ideologically driven austerity; tax cuts for the rich; deregulation; savage cuts to public services; the neglect of manufacturing and other key sectors; attacks on unions and workers’ rights; and the systematic dismantling of the welfare state and social security.

It should be about the terrible impact of these policies. A struggling economy; declining real wages; the growth in precarious work; widening inequality and increased poverty; rising xenophobia; reduced access to pensions and social security; the crumbling fabric of our health, education and other public services; increased household debt; and the mismanagement of the public finances.

We must put our services at centre of this election

PUBLIC WORKS:

May 2017 No 125

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The 120th STUC Congress saw 300 delegates from 39 unions and 20 trades union councils gather in Aviemore from 24-26 April.

With the announcement of a snap general election, the media eye was on the political guest speakers.

First minister Nicola Sturgeon addressed delegates, as did Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale - and UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn was greeted with a standing ovation on the first day.

But the real business lay in the host of debates on issues affecting the daily lives of working people in Scotland - mapping out the STUC’s priorities in the coming year.

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We report on some of them here with fuller versions of reports on the website.

• Reports are by Kate Ramsden and John Stevenson of UNISON Scotland Communications and Campaigns Committee.

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**Election: Use vote for positive policies**

*From front page*

We must have a campaign that is meaningful. Where progressive, outward looking policies and a socially just vision for the future are rewarded at the ballot box, and where reactionary, insular policies, which aim to exclude and divide, are rejected for the destructive agendas they represent.

*This election must be about the need for positive, progressive policies that support the interests of working people. The rewards, strong support for collective bargaining; an inclusive, sustainable economy; adequately resourced public services; fair and progressive taxation; decent living standards for all; and fair trade underpinned by global employment and environmental standards.*

We are at our most effective when we focus on talking to our own members about the issues UNISON has real authority to speak on - public services and the jobs and financial pressures faced by those who provide them.

We are able to talk directly to our own members to encourage them to press candidates from all parties on the progressive policy demands of the trade union movement.

Members can and should get more involved - asking questions of candidates or canvassers who knock on their door.

Let’s make sure we all use our vote.

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**Invest in the fire and rescue team**

The STUC will lobby the Scottish Government to stop cuts and properly fund the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, as it promised when it set up the single service.

UNISON amended the FBU motion to make it clear that ALL those who deliver the fire and rescue service – and indeed all other public services – are an essential part of the public service team.

These staff are not ‘backroom’ they are the ‘engine room’ that keeps the service on track.’

JOHN STEVENSON

UNISON’s John Stevenson said the union had been concerned from the outset about the centralising agenda – the sucking up of powers by the Scottish Parliament instead of the ‘subsidarity’ of putting control of services as close to the people as possible.

“And we predicted the problems that would come from a centralised police force,” said John.

UNISON had warned that we’d end up paying millions in VAT instead of on public services – are an essential part of the public service team.

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**If government serious about education, it needs to stop cuts**

STUC delegates heard of the real experience of education staff on the frontline as they voted on a campaign against cuts and expose the impact on tackling child poverty and inequality.

Back on a NASUWT motion, UNISON’s Carol Ball told Congress about UNISON Scotland’s ‘Hard Lessons’ survey of members working in schools last September.

Over 900 members respond across a range of school support roles from 25 local authorities.

Carol said: “Scottish Government figures show that between 2010 and 2015 there was an increase of 6,707 pupils in Scottish schools but there is 1,841 fewer support staff and 1,389 fewer teachers. These figures don’t just add up.”

“Library staff numbers in secondary schools have been cut from 334 to 249. Sadly it’s young people from the most deprived backgrounds that need school libraries and librarians most.”

The Scottish Government has also set up an improving science, technology, engineering and maths education as a priority and yet we have 251 less technicians in our schools to support this.”

Carol added: “Almost 80% of our members indicated that their workload is getting heavier. They are increasingly having to work extra unpaid hours and their expectations remain the same despite the cuts to support for learning, clerical and cleaning. This cannot continue.”

“If the Scottish Government is serious about raising attainment and reducing inequality for our children and young people, they need to realise that it takes the whole education team who should have access to high quality training and adequate resources to achieve this.”

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**Collective bargaining is the key to Fair Work**

Sectoral collective bargaining in both public and private sectors is the key to delivering on the Scottish Government’s Fair Work agenda, the STUC Congress was told.

A composite, including UNISON’s motion, called, for the “naming, shaming and prosecuting” of employers who do not meet the legal minimum standards, such as the National Minimum Wage, and speaking out against poor employment practice “such as exploitative zero/notional hour contracts.”

It called on the Scottish Government to use all the powers it has to promote collective bargaining at a sectoral level, particularly in areas like social care and childcare where the vast bulk of funding comes from the public purse.

Lilian Macer, UNISON Scotland convener, welcomed the report of the Fair Work Commission and the commitment of the Scottish Government to taking its recommendations forward.

She listed successes in Skills Development Scotland, promoting trade unions as ‘a force for good’ and in Kelvin College where a joint union/management group is trying to adopt the Fair Work framework.

But she warned that much work needs to be done to make the proposals a reality in people’s employment.

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**Election brings one chance - don’t lose it**

The general election on 8 June gives everyone a chance for a big change, award-winning filmmaker Ken Loach told the STUC Congress.

The man behind acclaimed films like Cathy Come Home, Kes, and the recent Palme d’Or winning ‘I Daniel Blake’, won a standing ovation from delegates as he urged them not to let this chance go by.

For Ken, Labour at last has a leader in Jeremy Corbyn, “who will stand with workers in struggle, as he stood with the steelworkers, the junior docs, the railway workers.

“For the first time in my lifetime I can stand and say I support the Labour leader. I think that’s extraordinary...we cannot let this chance go by.”

As for Labour’s chances in Scotland, he said the party was now “110 degrees different” from the one that lost the last election.

Reflecting the subject of ‘I Daniel Blake’, Ken said the Tories had imposed: “a policy of conscious cruelty” with a “programme of systematic punishment by the Department for Work and Pensions.”

When you get old you go for broke. We’ve got one chance for a big change. Don’t let’s lose it.”

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**Emergency fire control mergers or outsourcing are a ‘no go!’**

Any attempts by the Scottish Government to outsource emergency fire control rooms or merge them with other emergency services is “a no go from the outset!”, UNISON’s George McIrvine told the STUC.

He said that the specialisms of ambulance, fire and police staff should be maintained, as each and every incident received requires that particular skill set.

“Until policing in Scotland get their own house in order, how can you even debate the issue of merging three separate specialisms such as police, fire and ambulance.”

A group will take a detailed look at the employment practices in this sector to make recommendations that will bring tangible benefits for this predominantly female, low paid and insecure workforce.

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**When you get old you go for broke. We’ve got one chance for a big change. Don’t let’s lose it!**

Ken Loach of Work and Pensions’ forcing people into low-paid, insecure work through fear.

He spoke of people being sanctioned and left starving because they had missed assessments and change the sanctions regime.

Ken also warned that the rise of the far right across Europe was the “biggest challenge faced by the left in my lifetime.”

He asked: “Why should we be surprised at the rise of the right when governments have created a great pool of people who feel alienated, dispossessed and as though they have no future?”

He urged delegates not to miss this chance for a Labour government or the party would return to the right.

“When you get old you go for broke. We’ve got one chance for a big change. Don’t let’s lose it.”
Standing up for workers’ rights and against racism

Congress delegates agreed that it is time to turn the tide against the racism, misogynistic, disablist and other divisive language used by right wing politicians before and after the Brexit referendum.

The STUC will now explore new ways to challenge racism, xenophobia and bigotry by working with groups like Hope Note Hate and Stand Up To Racism, and share information between unions about effective workplace campaigns.

Moving UNISON’s amendment, Naomi Junnor said unions were uniquely placed to challenge racism: “The workplace is where our job is complete if we make the effort to challenge all incidents of racism and to promote activities that offer direct support to refugees”, she said.

Naomi spoke from personal experience of recent events where her Jewish identity was at the centre of comments made.

“I haven’t had to rise to such ignorance since I was a teenager. Two separate incidents revealing how ignorance perpetuates fear but allows for those looking for an easy scapegoat to be justified in their intolerance.

“It remains our responsibility to challenge scapegoating and show our strength in welcoming, opposing racism and nurturing tolerance.”

Reform should see public services as an investment

The STUC backed UNISON Scotland depute convenor Stephen Smellie’s call for a public service reform agenda based on improving services and involving staff and service users.

The UNISON Scotland motion called for change to be based on local democracy, not centralisation.

Stephen told delegates: “Everyone has a view on public service reform.”

“Proposals over the past couple of decades have suggested bigger local authorities or smaller local authorities; more health bodies or less; independent providers or shared services; outsourcing or in-sourcing; charitable trusts or limited liability companies, devolution or centralisation.

“Take your pick – but they have probably all been tried and failed and now need reformed – again.

Reforms that are aimed just at saving money are just cuts in another guise.’

STEPHEN SMELLIE

“Usually the problem with reforms is that their original justification is flawed.”

“We are told it is for efficiency. That means cuts and that is the wrong starting point.”

The Jimmy Reid Foundation recently published a report on Public Service Reform which recalled the principles of the Christie Commission.

Stephen continued: “The Christie Commission, welcomed and lauded by all political parties and promptly ignored, argued for reform on an integrated basis that was about improving services with citizen and staff involvement in reforms from the bottom up.

“It argued for reform that would see public services as an investment in society and not a cost to society.

“Where preventative, early intervention, public services would mean healthier and smarter kids able to engage with higher education and skills to the benefit of the economy.

“Where dealing with social and economic problems, creating jobs and improving communities would put less demands on public services not more.

“Reforms that are aimed just at saving money are just cuts in another guise.”

Stephen called for a public service reform agenda that is based only on improving services, increasing democratic accountability and engaging with citizens and staff.

STUC backs call for campaign against pension cuts for millions of women

Congress backed a campaign against Government pension cuts that have left millions of women’s retirement plans in chaos.

It will demand the government provides a full package of transitional arrangements for all women born on or after 6th April 1950 who were “unnecessarily” affected by the 1995 Tory Government’s Pension Act – not means-tested – and with compensation for losses for those women who have already reached their SPA.

Kate called on unions to support the WASPI campaign: “If there ever was a time when women needed to help other women, waiting up to six extra years for a pension, it is now.”

KATE RAMSDEN

“Shattered with devastating consequences.”

“Where preventative, early intervention, public services would mean healthier and smarter kids able to engage with higher education and skills to the benefit of the economy.

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Homeless Period campaign

The STUC backed the Homeless Period campaign to ensure tampons/towels are made available through homes and hostels by the Government.

UNISON’s Kate Ramsden said: “It should be a right for women and girls to access sanitary products whatever their means. It is about dignity and respect for all women.”

Beat food poverty

Congress pledged to keep up the pressure on the Scottish government to ensure food poverty is eradicated by 2030.

Seconding a motion slamming the “conscious cruelty” of the benefits system, UNISON’s Helen Dudgeon urged “state and together, united in not only protecting working incomes but also eradicating the draconian benefit sanctions and caps.”

More than warm words needed on attainment gap

The STUC pledged to continue campaigning for proper funding for all areas of education from early years to adult education to tackle the attainment gap.

UNISON’s Pat Rowland said: “Colleges have been a very important route to university but now there are half as many women in colleges than in 2007.

“Closing the attainment gap is something we fully support,” said Pat. “But we need more than warm words – We need action!”

Council pay ballot

From front page

The employers have offered: £350* for those earning less than £35,000 (pro rata on 37 hrs) 1% for those earning more than £35,000

Scottish Local Government Living Wage is the minimum pay for all pay and allowances including additional hours, contractual overtime and other allowances. It will be payable. Our claim is for: £1,000,000 flat rate for all. Continued uprating of the Scottish Local Government Living Wage. A future pay strategy to identify and redress the imbalance caused by previous pay awards below the rate of inflation.

Mark added: “We are encouraging members to raise the need for fair pay with all candidates in the general election.”

*Employers have offered: £350* for those earning less than £35,000 (pro rata on 37 hrs) 1% for those earning more than £35,000.
**Bullying disproportionately affects disabled workers**

by Andy Crooke

**Disabled Members’ Committee**

Bullying and harassment are common problems affecting many disabled workers. Research done by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development revealed that 37% of disabled workers compared to 18% of non-disabled workers have experienced bullying and harassment in various different formats, including violence.

Recent research by Cardiff University revealed the nature of impairments also leads to a significant variance in the figures compared to 38% of non-disabled workers who were being bullied. The Scottish Disabled Members’ Committee (SDMC) is in full support of taking the issues to the National Disabled Members’ Conference and also the STUC’s Disabled Workers’ Conference which will address a number of stories about bullying and harassment of those indirectly affected by those caring for disabled people, through the various motions debated there.

Look out for further information and guidance coming from the SDMC over the year about the issue through your branch.

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**Health conference backs Scotland call for campaign to defend NHS**

by Wastie Gaffney

Comm’s Campaigns Committee

Scotland won UNISON Health Conference’s backing for a five-point plan to build a campaign to defend the NHS.

The Conference in April called for the Health leadership to work with the Health Committees of the four nations and with Regional Health Committees to produce blueprints for the future provision of health care across the four countries of the UK. Over the coming years, people will be NHS services publicly funded, publicly owned and staffed by public employees.

- examine the partnership model of industrial relations in Scotland which has delivered significant gains for NHS staff at the same time as avoiding privatising of public services
- end the Jimmy Reid Labour government and senior opposition parties in all of the four countries in the UK to engage in serious, meaningful dialogue about the future of the health care provision.

In a rousing performance, Gordon McKay, Scotland NEC, Member, told delegates: “Today is about ensuring that this union makes sure the public knows that on June 9th there will be one of two governments in the UK.

“There will be either a Labour government whose vision of the NHS fits with that of this union. An NHS free at the point of need, paid for out of general taxation with those who can afford the most paying the most.

“The alternative is a Tory government committed to handing over our healthcare to leeches of private firms by the Tories..’

The biggest area of concern is an increasing elderly population who are seeing cuts in health care provision at the same time as an underfunded home care service.

Gordon advised Conference: “The Tories will hand over our NHS to pirates like Consor, whose 2028 will have received £3bn in public money for building a single hospital in Edinburgh that cost less than £200m to put up.”

Gordon warned: “The NHS won’t end with particular bang of a piece of legislation. It will end after being bled dry by the withholding of finances and the hiring off of our services to private firms by the Tories until it cannot deliver any more.”

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**Danny Gillespie: UNISON loses treasured comrade and friend**

Danny Gillespie

UNISON Scotland has lost a treasured comrade and friend with the death of Danny Gillespie on 23 April. The number and diversity of the tributes and people who turned out to celebrate Danny’s life on 2 May was a huge testament to the respect in which he was held.

Paying tribute, Mike Kirby, UNISON’s Scottish General Secretary and close friend, said: “Danny Gillespie, trade unionist, socialist, internationalist, comrade and friend. A follower of the beautiful game played by the famous Glasgow Celtic. Danny was a member of the trade union all his working life, firstly with Nalgo and more recently UNISON, and that close relationship was what introduced him to his wife Debbie. Both held leadership positions at branch, district/regional level and nationally.

“Danny joined the trade union in 1985. He played significant leadership roles in the electricity industry at branch, Scottish and UK level, particularly through the challenging times of Thatcher’s privatisation in the late 80s.

“A member of the Nalgo National Electricity Committee at that time, his most powerful work was on equality issues, LGBT rights at work and equal pay.

“Danny was elected to Nalgo’s NEC in 1991 and was a member of UNISON’s NEC.

“In addition to the national duties, Danny was the president and chairperson of the Scottish Electricity Branch from its creation in 1993 by the merger of the four SSEB Branches until he stepped down in March 2016.”

His close friend and co-branch officer Tony Grieve said: ‘I always thought of Danny as your glue in our branch and a friend to us all, always available to help and support with strength and humour.’

Mike continued: “Danny was a leading member of the Electricity Group and came first to publicly back the creation of the ground-breaking UNISON. Then when UNISON was created, he was at the forefront for the creation of the Energy section.

“Danny continued to chair the Scottish Utilities Committee and was a branch delegate to the Scottish Council until he stepped down in 2016.

“Let me quote a member of staff: ‘I would like to think I had Danny as a friend and a great example to me as a young Nalgo officer from whom I learned a great deal.’

“That commitment to helping others, using his own experience through adversity and his courageous fight, was reflected in other ways,” said Mike.

After Danny’s experience of lung cancer, he gave of his time volunteering for Macmillan to help others.

UNISON Scotland’s thoughts are with Debbie and all of Danny’s relatives and friends.

Donations in Danny’s memory can be made to Community HEART at everyclick.com/dannygillespie

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**End LGBT+ bullying**

The STUC backed “Time for Inclusive Education” which calls on the Scottish Government to underpin, in law, action in schools to end LGBT+ bullying, which still mars the lives of so many of our children.

UNISON’s Willie Docherty, seconding the STUC LGBT Workers’ motion, called for practical steps to ensure that education is truly inclusive, including training for all staff in schools.

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**We want to hear your news**

SIU is your paper, we want to hear your stories. Contact John Stevenson (Editor) john.stevenson@unison-scotland.org.uk or Trisha Hamilton t.hamilton@unison.co.uk

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