

Justice for Unison Four

FOUR SOCIALIST Party members were disciplined by Unison on trumped-up charges of racism, after producing a leaflet at the 2007 Unison conference, challenging the Standing Orders Committee (SOC) about ruling resolutions off the conference agenda.

Glenn Kelly

After a three-year long battle, we have at last been given justice in a court of law. Unison has been ruled to have acted unlawfully in disciplining us, banning us from office and taking control of our branches.

For three years the union officials have tried to hide behind the smear of racism, citing the three wise monkeys cartoon on the leaflet. But the judgment is absolutely clear on this question: "It is obvious to any-

one looking at the cartoon that it is meant to represent the well-known image of the three wise monkeys who see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil." The judge was coincidentally an Asian woman.

She later goes on to say that: "All four claimants are committed anti-racists and have fought against racism. They quite reasonably assumed that anyone who saw the leaflet would understand the cartoon to be saying that the SOC was out of touch and closing its mind to and ignoring issues that concerned the membership."

The cartoon was not a pictorial depiction of the members of the SOC... but a representation of its attitude towards motions that were submitted to it."

She describes the evidence from the chair of the SOC as being "inconsistent" and says that it wasn't credible. She also challenges the

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London regional secretary of Unison, Linda Perks. Linda Perks had stated the importance of the per-

ception of the alleged complainants about the leaflet but had failed to speak to any black members of the union, including Beverly Miller, chair of the union's Black Members' Committee and Clytus Williams, chair of the SOC.

In relation to the cartoon the judge says: "It must be emphasised that the monkeys in the cartoon could not by any stretch of the imagination be seen to be a caricature of Mr Williams."

What is clear is that we've been disciplined because we had the temerity to demand the right to debate whether union officials should be elected and live off a worker's wage, whether ordinary members should have control over strike action and whether the union should carry on funding the Labour Party, particularly at a time when a Labour government was voting through thousands of redundancies of our

members.

Many members, who are delighted at the tribunal result, are demanding that the bans be lifted, that we be reinstated in our branch and national positions and that our Unison branches be taken out of regional administration.

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We call on all Unison members and branches to demand that this injustice be undone. Plans are also being made to lobby Unison's national executive council.

• See also: www.stopthewitchhunt.org.uk/

Unison self-destructs at TSA but unionism stronger than ever

THERE WAS widespread outrage among Unison members at the Housing Corporation in 2007 when the union charged branch secretary, Suzanne Muna, with racism.

An ex-Unison member

The Corporation's Unison branch was exemplary: well organised, a good recruiter, financially healthy and highly democratic. Like the other three branches, it had a history of successfully defending members' interests across a wide spectrum of diversity strands, including race.

When the branch secretary's three-year ban from office was eventually imposed in March 2010, it came at a critical time for union members. The Tories had signalled their intent to close the Housing Corporation (now rebranded the Tenant Services Authority) in the forthcoming 'bonfire of the

quangos' if they won the election. This was later changed to plans for a merger with another housing quango, effective from April 2012, but with staff numbers cut by up to 40%, a pay freeze, and a restructure of remaining staff.

Unison decided to waste time on imposing regional control on the branch. The regional officer cancelled the planned AGM without reference to remaining officers, appointed himself the new unelected branch secretary, and wrote a series of letters to members attacking the branch committee.

Not surprisingly, the members were repulsed by this behaviour, and, denied a say in branch matters, voted with their feet. Unison's membership numbers at the Authority rapidly collapsed.

While the self-destructive actions of the regional officer and wider Unison bureaucracy destroyed confidence in Unison, it did not shake faith in collectivism, nor in the rep-

resentatives who had served members over the years. Members understood the need for a strong union to protect them from the impending Con-Dem attacks, and when the ex-Unison representatives took up stewards' positions in Unite, members rapidly followed.

Unite is now overwhelmingly the union of choice for staff at the Authority, and union density is around 64% within the bargaining group. This is at least 10% higher than average density before Unison's attack. Unite has also won some significant victories at the Authority with the help of their regional officer, including a pay uplift for around 60% of members.

Now that Unison's actions have been found unjustified and unlawful, Unison members are urged to call for an immediate investigation into how the union has repeatedly managed to make such disastrously bad judgements, repelling the very workers who should, at this time in particular, be flocking into its ranks.

South Wales - Rhondda Cynon Taff Building action against cuts

RHONDDA CYNON Taff (RCT) Council in South Wales has told its 10,000 strong workforce to sign new contracts - which constitute a massive pay cut - or lose their jobs. Unison and the GMB have told members not to sign, but they are offering no way forward. An Environmental Services worker spoke to Mariam Kamish for the Socialist:

"The council is offering £1,000 compensation to sign the new contract. That £1,000 could go a long way for me at the moment, but it's blackmail. They want to take away my time and a half for Saturdays and my driving money. I could lose £1,700 a year. On top of all that, they'll be paying us by the calendar

A care worker added: "I will lose £2,000 a year if this goes through... we have to do something"

month, instead of every four weeks, so that's another £1,000 a year."

A care worker added: "I will lose £2,000 a year if this goes through. I went to a meeting of all four unions and they just said that legally we cannot stop what the council is doing. But we have to do something"

Many council workers are asking why industrial action cannot

be taken against the council. Some suspect that the union leaders do not want to embarrass the Labour council just before the Assembly elections.

Socialist Party Wales in RCT is calling for an immediate strike ballot of RCT council workers for all out action with emergency cover to defeat these vicious cuts.

• More on www.socialistparty.org.uk

Demonstrate against the cuts
19 February, assemble
11.30am at Ynys Angharad
Park, Pontypridd.

Defending jobs at Leeds council

LEEDS CITY council has put forward its 'final' offer to the unions. The council intends to cut £90 million from its 2011/12 budget as part of a bigger spending cuts package, £150 million over four years. This will result in 2,500-3,000 jobs being axed.

Recently my motion to unite all the separate disputes by defending

all the existing conditions and opposing all the cuts through coordinated collective action was passed by Unison members.

But the branch has decided to go for a consultation ballot, recommending that they reject the council's offer.

The four unions Unison, GMB, Unite and UCATT are jointly ballot-

ing their respective memberships. The ballot will run from 7-21 February.

In the meantime branch activists are building for a lobby of the council on 23 February, at the Civic Hall from 12.30.

A Leeds Unison member

• More on www.socialistparty.org.uk

Medirest workers fight on



Health workers in Southamptons and Bucks strike again to recover their unpaid wages from Medirest. photo Southamptons SP

Striking teachers fight job cuts



Striking Rotherham teachers join an anti-cuts demo on 29 January. They were on strike for three days the previous week, fighting savage job cuts at Rawmarsh school. photo Yorkshire SP

Keep in touch online

For regular updates on these disputes and other workplace and trade union news, see the Socialist Party website: www.socialistparty.org.uk

