

Usdaw Leadership Put Under Scrutiny at ADM

Usdaw's 2014 Annual Delegate Meeting (ADM) opened to a back-drop of a series of announcements of job losses and cuts in Tesco. Anger over members finding this out through social media and the union's complacency in the face of such attacks peppered contributions at ADM.

As ever many of the propositions challenging the Usdaw leadership's position never made it to ADM floor, 15 were ruled out of order before the conference, despite union rules allowing for minor redrafting issues to be resolved through correspondence with branches which was not carried out.

At ADM itself, a number of propositions were referred or withdrawn including one opposing HS2 and one on the union's donations to the Labour party, as well as one calling for the vote of pay deals to

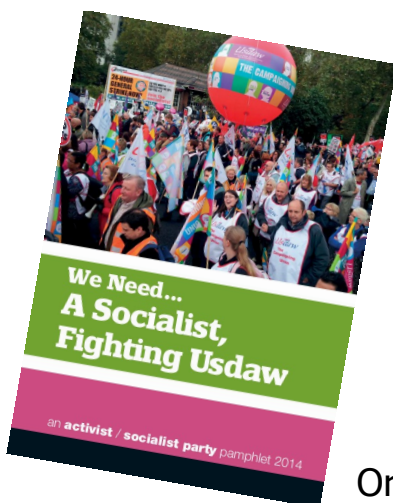
be returned to members in Tesco. This didn't stop criticism of the union's leadership - a whole series of delegates got up to speak on the union's annual report, usually a more mundane part of ADM. Iain's criticism of the union leadership's attendance at an international trade union conference in Argentina where the only official mention by the union so far was a sentence in the report particularly struck a chord. He pointed that if we're sending delegates around the world to discuss with our fellow workers, then this should be reported so we can learn from their struggles - highlighting the inspiring struggles in the US to organise Walmart workers as well as fighting for a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

This, and other interventions into the debate at ADM, led to a growing interest in the Socialist Party

and its bulletin in the union, the *Activist*. Over a hundred copies of the *Socialist* were sold at ADM (more than 1 for every 8 attendees), alongside 50 copies of the new *Activist* pamphlet (see advert below). A number of people signed up to the mailing list for the *Activist* which now comes out bi-monthly with others asking about joining the Socialist Party.

A whole series of issues affecting retail workers were discussed, including motions on understaffing, disciplinary policies relating to alcohol sales and the differential rates of the minimum wage. A key debate took place around zero hour contracts where, unfortunately, the resulting composite that was passed mentioned every constraint except abolishing them.

A survey by Usdaw whose results were distributed to ADM attendees showed a damning 86 out of



New pamphlet

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8th annual conference takes place on
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Speakers include:

Ronnie Draper - BFAWU General Secretary, Steve Gillan - POA General Secretary, Janice Godrich - PCS President
See www.shopstewards.net for info

90 on zero hour contracts would prefer a contract with regular hours.

Motions were also passed to campaign to abolish tuition fees & working closer with student unions & NUS as well as renationalising public transport. A motion congratulating Miliband on his energy price freeze was amended to say that the best means of controlling energy prices was "to renationalise the energy companies with democratic control including workers in industry and consumers over prices".

Big issues of accountability still remain in the union - at ADM itself a press release was issued saying that an out-of-hours helpline ser-

vice, which was debated at ADM, would commence in August, without the elected EC ever having discussed this. This was used to pass the S1 subs increase this year, the second year in the row after the leadership promised extra Area Organiser's last year, a promise only fulfilled at the beginning of this year.

We will be building support for the candidates endorsed by the Broad



John Hannett using the 'carrot' of an out-of-hours helpline to push through this year's increase in membership subs

Left meeting at ADM in the union's upcoming elections including Socialist Party members Scott Jones for EC in South Wales & Western division and Amy Murphy for re-election to EC in Southern division and for President.

Labour will not deliver Andy Burnham's promise of a 'spirit of '45'

Andy Burnham, Labour's shadow health secretary, was the guest speaker at this year's Usdaw Annual Delegate Meeting in May. Burnham was thanked for his work in helping the families of Hillsborough victims fight for justice, although it should be noted it was a heckle that finally kick-started the process that led to the new inquests not Burnham's work. A heckle by Roy Dixon who stood for the Trade Unionist & Socialist Coalition in the recent local elections and said of Labour, "I don't believe Labour are a party of the people, of the workers."

Burnham spoke of a need for a new 'spirit of '45', referring to the 1945 Labour government, a term coined by Ken Loach for his recent film on the subject, Loach of course another who has drawn the conclusion that a new mass work-

ers party is required. However, Burnham did not speak of what this spirit of '45 would entail, much like Ed Miliband, speaker last year, he was full of good sound bites but short on substance. He evaded the need for nationalisation of energy and rail companies, something Labour in 1945 achieved, he described zero hour contracts as a 'cancer' but failed to mention Labour will allow bosses to use them for a year before workers have any rights and he talked about tackling 'unfair rent practises' without referring to anything approaching a rent cap which is the only method of solving this crisis.

Andy Burnham took a few questions after speaking, most of which seemed handpicked and barely challenged him, however after another round of questioning was allowed, some proper questioning

did sneak through.

One delegate angrily accused Andy Burnham of doing nothing for years over car parking charges at hospitals which undermines an NHS free for all and another delegate, fed up with Burnham's evasive statements, branded him the same as all politicians and asked him to be honest and open about his views and what he is going to do.

Usdaw's guest speaker didn't stick around for the rest of the politics session which in the end only consisted of two propositions but one Andy Burnham would have done well to have taken heed of. A proposition calling for support for Labour's energy price pledge also called for the re-nationalisation of the energy companies under democratic control of workers and

consumers as the best way of achieving this reform, a true spirit of '45 and was unanimously supported.

The only other proposition to make it was effectively calling for a right-wing approach to the European Union, unsurprisingly supported by the Executive Council. There was the potential for a good debate about our links with Labour and political representation for the working class, with a proposition from Dundee calling for Usdaw's funding of Labour to be cut as they are not representing us, this proposition though was sadly withdrawn, joining another proposition about the Labour link by Llanelli (blocked before the conference) in not being debated.

Andy Burnham's speech and the Usdaw leadership's fear of debating the affiliation to his party both provide evidence of Labour's alienation



Does the Labour party leadership defend the values supported by trade unionists?

from the working class and what the working class want. New Labour promised to renationalise the railways before the 1997 general election, then didn't during 13 years of government, can they and Burnham even be trusted on protecting the NHS?

It's clear that a new mass workers party, funded by trade unions is required. The battle in Usdaw is to challenge the leadership over the issue and engage Usdaw members in the debate so we can democratically decide and build true representation for the working class.

A Left Challenge in the Executive Elections

Later this year, the elections for Usdaw's President and EC will take place. As the Activist has continued to document, the record of the current President and Executive is woeful. Despite a few voices that are prepared to challenge the current mis-leadership of the union, they are currently presiding over the huge cuts to jobs and terms and conditions across the retail and distribution sector.

At this year's Broad Left meeting at ADM only a few candidates were endorsed. Whilst we stand by the decision to endorse those candidates, we believe this falls short of what the union really needs - a challenge across all the divisions from candidates on a common fighting programme.

With only one actual meeting of the Broad Left each year at ADM, there is no realistic prospect of this body democratically agreeing further candidates. Moreover, the meeting did not discuss on what basis such candidates would stand.

Whilst arguing within the Broad Left that it should become a more active body with a leadership elected at an AGM which aims to co-ordinate between militant reps and shop stewards in the union, the Activist believes that action should be taken to secure as wide a left challenge as possible.

The Activist believes that a basic programme of demands, such as the following would make the best basis for a left challenge:

- Opposition to partnership and restoration of the vote on pay in Tesco
- For an active campaign to make the union's policy of a living wage a reality
- Support members who wish to take industrial action to defend jobs, pay and terms and conditions
- A transparent and democratic union. Reports of EC meetings to be printed in the union's publications as well as a comprehensive set of minutes to be circulated to all branches

We invite all reps and members who wish to stand on such a programme for divisional council or the executive council to contact us at usdawactivist@gmail.com

Mailbag:

The Activist received the following letter from a retail worker in one of the major supermarkets that Usdaw organises in. Although the gains registered from their action was quite limited, this does show that workers are prepared to take action over staff shortages, just like workers in the US are doing on a much wider scale.

After a very prolonged period of time understaffed and cut to the bone with no extra hours, not getting breaks due to no cover available, and an incident that saw me suffer a concussion and mild hypothermia due to having a fit by the freezer whilst alone, I and others had had enough.

Walking in to find the usual work not done due to lack of evening staff, myself, the other member of staff on my department, the entirety of the fruit&veg section and the cafe walked out and sat at the back of checkouts. This was prior to store opening. We stayed there for 45mins, watching how fast everything fell apart.

You may think that 4 departments on a set-up would be quite a few people right? There were 6 of us. That was the entirety of the morning staff for the first HALF of the store, expected to get everything on sale, cleaned, legal and full in two hours (bearing in mind delivery arrives at 7am, so one hour for fruit and veg) We said to the management "do you still think we are not understaffed? There are 6 of us here, yet the store is at a stand still. That cannot be right"

Sadly the outcome was for a few days they tip-toed around us, but still we got no extra staff. Although a little reminder that we have done it before and will again usually nabs us some very precious extra hours for a

week or two.

A Morrisons rep

Dear Activist,

This is my third letter about life in Tesco. In this letter, I want to contrast the atmosphere at Usdaw's ADM and the mood in Tesco. Although at this year's conference, there were some attempts to hold Hannett and the EC to account.

Questions were asked about figures and items on the anti-Hannett blog, and references to the number of full-timers but no one backed these few brave delegates who dared to challenge our master. It would seem that all is well in camp Usdaw and John Hannett was happy at the end of conference.

However, in the real world of Tesco the atmosphere is not at all happy. The talk on the shop floor is Tesco is falling apart: nobody is happy, there are staff cuts, broken equipment, no tools for the job, no staff, no overtime and even no uniforms. And the customers are complaining more and more, especially about the state of the shops. As a rep, the main complaint is how Tesco has changed over the years and not for the good.

The rumours abound about the wage claim. it seems, this year, that the offer from Tesco was so bad that even the negotiating team rejected it. Staff are saying they want to bring back the wage offer vote because they want a say if it is not good enough.

Ms Paula L, Tesco rep

Dear Activist,

I've always heard people mention about AO's and other union officials trying to influence the discussion at ADM in favour of the General Secretary and his friends.

Until now, I've been sceptical as to how deliberate that was. But at this years ADM I witnessed an AO walk up to a rep in one of the branches she covered and handed her a question to ask Andy Burnham. The rep clearly hadn't asked for any help writing the question by the fact that she turned to those sat next to her

Please add me to your mailing list as I want to find out how I can help make Usdaw more democratic.

An ADM delegate

Dear Activist,

I was surprised to get a call from a neighbour this afternoon - could I use cooking apples, peppers, potatoes, salad? Turns out she had been shopping at a supermarket in a nearby town, and noticed a member of staff tipping bleach all over a stack of goods they were throwing out.

As well as salvaging several bags of perfectly good fruit and veg, she also managed to retrieve a number of bags of clothes, some of it for children, which was again being drenched in bleach. She's washing the clothes and retrieving usable items to go to a local charity shop... but why couldn't the store have given the items to charity themselves? There are branches of Oxfam and Red Cross within sight of the supermarket! There's also an active food bank in the town who might well have been able to pass the fruit and veg on to some of the many needy families on its books.

I'd heard of this kind of thing happening, but didn't realise it was so widespread. Legal maybe, but so very wrong. The supermarket in question was Aldi... but do they all do it?

Kate Jones, retired Co-op worker