

INSIDE: Unions21 Fair Work Commission research • Lessons for the next generation of union leaders

Unions21 celebrates 20 years of serving the union movement

FIGHTING FOR FAIRNESS

Ian Murray MP is making the case for redundancy rights

WITH THE UK economy shrinking again and virtually no growth over the last two years – the blame for which is firmly placed at the doors of Numbers 10 and 11 Downing Street – sadly we have seen a considerable number of redundancies. Indeed, it has been found that they continue to be announced at a rate of 164,000 per quarter.¹

Collective redundancies are, of course, one of the most dramatic forms of job loss. As one Coryton Refinery worker described it: "It's heart-wrenching to be honest". That is why the current legislation on collective redundancy is so vital; it allows for particular care to the process of achieving business restructuring, ensuring that employees are involved as much as possible in the decision-making and if job losses are necessary then all employees and their representatives are closely involved.

So it is strange that the Tory-led government have decided, with the jobs market in a precarious place, that now is the time to look at watering down the rules around redundancy procedures. They recently announced their intention to cut in half the current minimum of 90 days consultation to 45 days and have also proposed new non-statutory guidance, produced by the conciliation service Acas, which they say will promote good quality consultation and engagement between employers and employees.

Let's be clear – the current period of 90 days was hard fought for and Labour will be doing its utmost to defend it against this Tory-led government's zeal for reducing the rights of people at work. As has been the case for all the Tory-led government's proposals on employment rights, they are failing to produce evidence that would merit any change.

Ministers have sought to suggest that employers are hamstrung and it is difficult for them to conclude negotiation before 90 days. However, there are plenty of examples available already which show there is ample opportunity to end the consultation before 90 days if an agreement is reached. For example, the



retail union Usdaw were involved in consultation with Yodel (ex HDNL), a company which was losing about £1 million a week. Both employer and trade union were in agreement that it was important that changes were implemented as soon as possible to keep the company in business. The consultation began on 19 October 2011 and ended on 9 December in an agreed phased redundancy payment over a period of time. The union also points to a recent consultation they held with the retailer Makro which was completed in 62 days as agreement was reached. These examples show that a change in legislation isn't needed – the ability to conclude negotiations earlier is already being utilised.

Consultation

A TUC survey of union workplace reps conducted with the Labour Research Department (LRD) in 2010 showed that between a third and almost a half of workplaces appear to have consultation periods which exceed the statutory minimum, that is consultation of more than 90 days for 100-plus job cuts, more than 30 for 20-99 job cuts, and any collective consultation where less than 20

job cuts were involved. There are numerous examples of consultation lasting more than 90 days including a chemical manufacturer able to reduce proposed job losses down to 93 in a consultation period lasting seven months. The union representative involved welcomed the seriousness with which the employer approached the consultation, genuinely seeking to engage with the workforce and to avoid redundancies.

Employers spent £4.4 billion on redundancy payouts during the 12 months to March 2011. The question can be posed therefore that, if it had not been for consultation between employer and employees then that amount could have been significantly higher as a result of a higher number of redundancies which would have resulted without consultation. The hidden costs of redundancies can be huge and whilst they may seem one of the most straightforward ways of cutting costs, as academics from the Institute for Employment Studies have found: "[t]he hidden costs arise from the cost of recruitment, induction and training, as well as from the effect of redundancies on the surviving employees. Against this background, redevelopments might not be seen as such a expensive option." These are the sorts of options that can be weighed fully during the current 90 day period of consultation.

The findings of the TUC survey also reveal that the

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¹ www.tuc.org.uk/tucfiles/223/CallforEvidenceCollectiveredundancyconsultation.pdf

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Unions21 research shows public back living standards campaigns

Damian Lyons Lowe and
Patrick Brione of Survation

SURVATION'S POLLING work on behalf of the Unions21 Fair Work Commission revealed the extent of discontent among UK employees regarding pay and influence in the workplace. A detailed survey of 1,163 UK employees in full and part time work was completed between 20 and 23 November 2012.

Two themes were key. Firstly, employees were experiencing a severe sense of powerlessness in the face of worsening economic conditions and secondly there were rising demands for tough action to address unfair and worsening pay deals, which penalise those at the bottom whilst rewarding those at the top.

Unequal power

We asked full and part-time workers what they considered the current balance of power was in the UK between employers and employees.

72% of British workers replied that they felt that employers had more power than employees, with average employees feeling that employers have more than twice as much power in the workplace as they did.

The polling did show a widespread sense of concern among employees that this unequal power relationship was being abused by their employers. When asked what they considered the number one issue that unions need to concentrate on improving, "protection from bad employers" was surprisingly rated top, ahead of both pay and job security, and was listed by 27% of employees; equivalent to 8 million members of the UK workforce. Clearly this is an area that requires urgent attention from both unions and government.

The main causes of this employee powerlessness arise directly from the poor condition of the UK economy. Specifically, the rise in part-time over full-time work and lack of job security due to redundancy fears, both of which give employers leverage to exploit their workers. Around 865,000 more people are out of work than before the banking crisis first began back in 2007. The number of people in full-time jobs has fallen by 399,000, while the number in part-time employment has increased by 713,000. Official figures show a quarter of those in part-time roles saying they want to work longer each week. In our poll "Job security" was rated the second most important issue for unions to address, by 26% of respondents, with pay issues close behind on 25%; these issues are clearly at the forefront of employees' minds. The proportion of workers who said that they felt employees had "no power" at all in the workplace was also significantly higher among part time workers (16%), than full time workers (10%).

A plausible explanation, then, is that employees are finding themselves in part-time or short-term working arrangements that do not offer the same employment protections as permanent full-time contracts, and that fears over losing their jobs are pressuring workers into accepting working conditions and pay settlements which they would otherwise have resisted. These problems are

particularly true for women, who make up the majority of part-time workers and who continue to face lower pay and less favourable working conditions than their male counterparts.

The danger for businesses is that these unempowered employees are becoming disengaged, unenthusiastic and therefore unproductive and costly to the economy. Only 39% of UK employees surveyed thought that their "current job is one step in part of a longer career I am pursuing" as opposed to 61% who thought it was "just a way to pay the bills until I can find something else to do". Among part time workers, the disparity was even stronger with only 23% seeing their job as part of a career compared to 77% who did not. Only among the AB socio-economic group was there a majority of respondents – 64%, seeing their job as part of a career; clearly only those already in high paid jobs are really feeling engaged with their work.

Unequal pay

It seems clear that a sense of unfairness has become deeply entrenched in our labour market in the UK, something that probably pre-dates the current financial crisis but has been very much worsened and exposed by it. Over half of all respondents in our survey, 56%, felt that issues of unfairness were "more often avoided than acknowledged and resolved" in their workplace. Seemingly existing mechanisms for addressing employee grievances are not functioning as they should be.

In terms of what the main contributing factors are to this sense of unfairness, there can be little doubt that pay is at the top. When asked to rank issues in terms of how much of a "barrier to fairness" employees felt they were, respondents put "unequal pay" top, followed closely by "unequal opportunities for career progression". Combined, these two issues suggest that a large proportion of the UK workforce feels trapped in low paid jobs, with no prospects of ever accessing the small number of executive jobs at the top that have captured almost all pay growth in the UK over the past five years.

This sense of unequal pay was further highlighted in our polling by the fact that a quarter of workers reported that the decisions as to "who is paid what" in their workplace were either "quite unfair" or "very unfair". Such results may be unsurprising when considering findings such as those of the High Pay Commission, which found a 49% rise in FTSE 100 executive pay during 2010, at a time when average employee pay rose by just 2.7%, below the rate of CPI inflation. Prospects for ordinary workers remain dire. With unemployment

levels broadly stabilising, low and declining pay are now the prime concerns of the day for most working families.

When asked about how their pay had changed since 2010, 71% of employees surveyed – the UK equivalent of 21 million workers – reported that their wages have fallen in real terms over the last two years, compared with only 7% who reported a real terms pay increase.

This strong sense of unfairness in rapidly growing pay for the wealthy coupled with the threat of declining real pay for the majority was reflected in support for strong government action. The same proportion as saw their own pay fall, 71%, reported that they would support a move to "legally cap the total bonus payout anyone can receive,

including share options, at double their base salary", and an overwhelming 87% of workers said they would support a "law that triggered an automatic consultation with all low-paid employees once any company began to make profits over a certain threshold". Despite government reluctance to legislate on the issue of bonuses and executive pay, it seems almost certain that they would enjoy strong public support if they were to make the attempt.

Meanwhile there is also support for action by individual companies. Three quarters of working people (74%) said they would be more likely to buy products or services from a company that pays its workforce the Living Wage rather than the Minimum Wage, perhaps unsurprising when considering that 83% thought the current Minimum Wage of £6.19 for adults wasn't enough to meet living costs in Britain today.

A clear desire for government action

Overall these figures paint a picture of a growing level of resentment among UK employees that their employers are doing little to help them during difficult economic times, only further compounded by the sense of unfairness created by high executive pay awards at a time when most ordinary workers are seeing their wages frozen or falling. With employees feeling powerless to bring about pay reform themselves, either companies need to take it upon themselves to improve fairness or the government must seize the initiative and compel them to do so. Unless the government takes notice of this clear public demand for action and is able to do something to address the concerns of British employees, it is likely to risk further industrial and civil unrest in the months and years ahead.

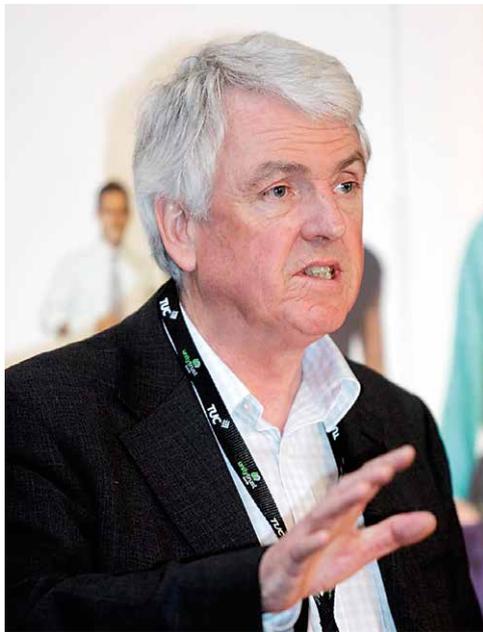
■ For more on the Fair Work Commission visit www.fairworkcommission.co.uk



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Lessons for the

Leading trade unionists Alan Manning and Paul Noon have recently retired from prominent positions after long careers in the movement. Unions21 asked them for their lessons for the next generation of union leaders



Alan Manning: Our basic honesty prevents us from the eye watering insincerity of crude marketing campaigns. It is right that in a democratic movement we have healthy debate and real differences of approach but equally it is a fact borne out by our history that our unity is our greatest asset

ALAN MANNING

Despite all the negative headlines we have had success

I FIRST started working for the TUC when Jim Callaghan was Prime Minister and became North West Regional Secretary as Thatcher consolidated her position with the resignation of Heseltine and Leon Brittan and Murdoch began the assault on the print unions with the move to Wapping.

Reflecting on the changes I have seen in my career with the TUC it would be easy to focus on the adverse “headlines” – membership loss, the hostile legal climate or the perceived reduction in political influence.

But I think there is a more significant paradox in the experience of our movement over the last 30 and more years. For me the biggest underlying feature has been the very significant change in the composition of our membership reflecting the transformation in industrial structure and occupations.

When I attended my first meeting of the NW TUC in the late 1970s the majority

of members were miners’ union officials, sheet metal workers, boilermakers, foundry workers, engineers and textile workers. Looking at the TUC’s overall membership in 1977 only just over a quarter of the almost 12 million members were public employees – and that figure included the over 360,000 who worked for the Post Office.

The changes were comparatively swift and dramatic and hit areas of traditional union strength the recession of the early 1980s triggered by the oil shocks but made many times worse by Thatcherite monetary policy, cut over ¾ million jobs in manufacturing, textile unions saw their membership more than halved – the Rochdale based Amalgamated Textile Workers Union for example saw its membership plummet from over 35,000 at the end of 1979 to just 15,000 in 1983 as the economy spluttered into some sort of recovery.

Recession

I have argued before that the impact of that recession had a much more immediate effect on trade union confidence than the steady accretion of Tebbit’s laws over the following decade. The return to many communities of mass unemployment in the early part of the Thatcher era did

PAUL NOON

Talking tough does not amount to a strategy for progress

I AM not sure that the idea of superannuated union bosses laying down the law on what should happen after their departure is a good one. Personally, I feel that I have had every opportunity to lead my people to the Promised Land after serving for 38 years as a union official, 14 as General Secretary of my union and 11 years on the TUC General Council.

And yet, maybe as a characteristic of my calling, I never could pass up the chance to give unsolicited and probably unwanted advice so the following represents my views of what the trade union movement should do next. It is, as they say on the ultra-left, written in a personal capacity and is not intended to represent the views of my former union, Prospect.

I commend the following six point plan;

BE CLEAR ABOUT OUR “OFFER”. We have to sell the trade union product to people who may not have an antipathy to trade unions but are likely not to know very much about us. Unions and their leaders are no longer household names, family connections have been lost and young people leave school or university simply not knowing much about us. Our experience in Prospect is mostly amongst graduates who, saddled with a mountain of student debt, will conduct a straight cost benefit analysis of the price of subs against the perceived potential gains of membership. Appeals to class solidarity will not cut it; we need to be able to convince them that they will get something back, and that it will represent value for money.

DELIVER ON OUR PROMISES. If people perceive a difference between what we say we will do and what happens in practice they will probably leave, and even if they do stay are unlikely to become convincing advocates for our cause. So if we say we will give expert advice and support we

have to do just that all the time. People nowadays expect high service levels and rapid communication and we must find ways to provide just that.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE. Successful trade unions cannot be just vehicles of protest; they have to be able to deliver agreements, even if this means taking some tough decisions at times. Tempting though it may be to walk away from hard choices, where we can get a better deal for a recommendation to accept and where we know that we have no practical way of delivering improvements we have to put this in front of members. Some unions did this in the recent changes in public sector pensions – others, in my opinion, did not.

CELEBRATE OUR SUCCESSES NOT OUR FAILURES. To listen to some recent TUC Congresses you could be forgiven for thinking that we never achieve anything, so bad is our condition and so dire is our collective plight. People will not join organisations that perceive themselves as not achieving anything – we could

and should use Congress as a way of showcasing our success not (just) moaning about the Government.

SUPPORT THE TUC BRAND. In all the work we have done our evidence is that the TUC has a far higher and more positive recognition factor than any individual union. We should pool resources and even sovereignty to promote trade unionism through the TUC. What about a TUC card for university and college students to guide people into the appropriate union when they start work? We have a fantastically able new General Secretary in Frances O’Grady and we should give her and the TUC all possible support.

GET REAL. I fully understand why the last TUC Congress called for consideration of a call for a general strike. Delegates felt frustrated at our inability to turn the tide and defeat the many and manifest injustices meted out to us by the coalition government. Other trade union colleagues would always have been in favour of a

next generation

more to undermine union militancy in the early years than the anti union laws. The tightening legal framework did have an impact and the course of high profile struggles such as those of the miners and print workers were undoubtedly affected by laws and politics.

But, in my experience in the North West it was the beginnings of the changes – ratcheted through subsequent recessions of the '90s and 2000s; that have seen continued step changes in the nature of work leading to a much more fragmented work force with higher levels of insecure employment, more distributed companies and smaller work unit sizes, the decline of manual work and the spread of IT design and control systems.

Our movement has changed from one dominated by male manual crafts to today when the “typical” trades unionist is more likely to be a woman associate professional in the public sector. Unions have had to change to seek to respond to these changes.

But the paradox is that despite all these very significant changes the basic trade union job remains essentially the same – seeking justice in the workplace, equalising the employer – worker relationship through enhancing workers voice through

general strike at any time I have been on the General council. Yet talking tough may make some people feel better but it does not amount to a strategy for making progress on our policy objectives. Irrespective of the not insignificant question of the legality of a general strike against a political objective, what possibility is there of unions who could barely get credible ballot results on the key issues of pensions delivering sustained action to get rid of the Government?

I do realise that this vision of pragmatic, moderate trade unionism focussing on effective member support will be dismissed as weak beer by those who favour the headier brews of militancy and strife. I should make it clear also that I am not opposed as a matter of principle to strikes or other industrial action. Prospect membership is equally spread across the public and private sectors and we have had disputes in both, in all cases fully supported by me as General Secretary. But they must be strikes with a clear objective, putting maximum

collective organising.

And despite all the negative headlines we have had success.

As a movement we retain a presence in the overwhelming majority of workplaces of any size, we have a reach that is unique and a perspective that transcends individual companies or vested interests and we have achieved tangible gains in the workplace and beyond.

Union members are better paid than non – members, the current official figures show that union members on average earn £14.80 an hour which is over 18% more than non members at £12.01.

Unionised workplaces are safer workplaces. There is a wealth of evidence that has been produced over the past 10 years, both in the UK and abroad that shows that those employers who have trade union health and safety committees and union safety reps have half the injury rate of those employers who try to manage safety without unions or joint arrangements.

Unionised workplaces are fairer workplaces; again all the evidence suggests that there are more likely to be effective equality and anti discrimination policies in unionised workplaces and pay gaps for women and BME workers are much less.

The development over recent years

pressure on the employer at minimum cost to members and in support of early settlement.

One final point. The TUC and unions need, in my view, to find a way of developing a relationship with and exerting influence on governments of any complexion. This means talking to them, and also listening to Ministers with whom we may have profound disagreements, but who are still the legitimate product of an elective process. Our sisters and brothers in Northern Europe have been able to do this rather more effectively than has been the case in the UK, so maybe we could learn a few lessons there.

I suspect the outcome will be that unions will adopt different strategies, in part driven by the demographics of their memberships and that some will thrive and others struggle, and that whereas the overall level of union membership will continue to fall any predictions of the demise of trade unionism will be unfounded. I will certainly continue to do everything I can to support the cause, but from the side-lines not the centre.

of union workplace learning reps – an idea born and tested in the North West in very difficult political and economic circumstances in the mid 1990's – brings opportunities for personal and skills development in unionised organisations that are simply not there in non union areas.

We have had many wider successes too over my time with the TUC.

Minimum wage

The establishment of the National Minimum Wage gave 2 million workers a significant pay rise and for the first time a statutory right to paid holidays was extended to 6 million workers. We have also achieved important anti discrimination legislation, recognition of the rights of temporary and agency workers, and the regulation of gang masters.

We have a diversity that we can be proud of and we have the largest army of volunteers of any sector in society. And as I have argued above we have a demonstrable track record of delivery.

Yet despite all this we seem to be increasingly on the back foot, reacting to adverse trends rather than seizing opportunities to shape them and too often seem to be presenting a view that the “glass is half empty”.

It may be that having been on the receiving end of management speak and fads in overly positive communication strategies when everything is marvellous until the receivers arrive, we shy away from blowing our own trumpet too much. Our basic honesty prevents us from the eye watering insincerity of crude marketing campaigns. It is right that in a democratic movement we have healthy debate and real differences of approach but equally it is a fact borne out by our history that our unity is our greatest asset.

If I could suggest any lessons for the future it would be that we do have a very creditable story to tell and it would benefit the movement as a whole if we were all committed to the same set of whole movement messages.

Collective organisation works – trained and confident workplace reps, involved members, enabled by union resources and dedicated staff deliver real improvements in pay, fairness, safety and prospects.

Our core values are as relevant to the digital age as they were when Congress first met in Manchester in 1868.

Members do win with employers and Governments and we build confidence and unity by recognising and celebrating our successes.



Paul Noon: I suspect that unions will adopt different strategies, in part driven by the demographics of their memberships and that some will thrive and others struggle

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Unions21 at 20

Unions21 hits 20 this year. We asked staff past and present for their memories

Nina Temple

Open space that is still so needed

UNIONS21 EMERGED from an initiative in 1992 to support the miners' campaign against Heseltine's planned pit closures. This was expressed practically in the launch of the Scottish miners' march from Glasgow to London that sought to build public support for the mining communities.

The march arrived in London just before Christmas 1992. On route it was warmly greeted by many communities. Alongside many trade union organisations the march was supported by *New Times* (journal of the post communist Democratic Left) and the *New Statesman*. In January 1993 I met with the respective editors Mike Power and Steve Platt to discuss how to take this initiative forward. With encouragement from the TUC's John Monks, and some of the more modernising general secretaries we decided to hold a one off conference entitled "Unions 93".

The conference was lively, well attended, and thought-provoking. However, the conference made a loss of over £2,000, which Democratic Left met, but could not underwrite in future. So to secure funding I approached trade unions and the Barry Amiel trust – with some success. During one of those discussions the GMB's John Edmonds pointed out that we needed a mission statement, and he said that our unique selling point could be to provide: "an open space for informal discussion about the future of the trade union movement".

Buoyed up by this encouragement we followed on with Unions94, which brought together for the first time on a public platform the newly elected leaders Tony Blair and John Monks. Unions94 attracted nearly 600 participants, and also featured Sam Shiloa, leader of COSATU, from the newly liberated South Africa, with entertainment supplied by the famous Ronnie Scott's jazz quartet.

It was a pleasure watching the project grow over the following years and a delight having the opportunity to work with so many wonderful people. These included: John Monks, Margaret Prosser, Ray Collins, Hugh Lanning, Hilary Benn, Jim McAuslan, Clive Brooks, Ken Penton, Fiona Bowden, Sarah Ward, and Martin O'Donovan.

I left the project in 2000 and am pleased to see that Unions21 continues to provide the valuable and important "open space" that is still so needed.



Ken Penton

An important role to play

I HAD BEEN working for Labour Students for a year and was looking for something else challenging to do within politics when I approached by Bill Brown – a fellow Labour Student – to help him with what some work he had been doing for what was then called Unions 94 – in those days it changed its name each year. Changing it to Unions21 after I left was a very good idea, not least on stationery costs!

What actually attracted me to working with Nina Temple – still the best manager I have ever worked for – and Mike Powell, John Monks, Hilary Benn and many trade union officers and rank and file trade union members who I don't have space to mention, was that it was seen as a "neutral space for debate and discussion" to generate ideas on how unions could seek to gain the support of wider civic society as a "force for good". This was particularly important after the denigration of unions in the Thatcher years.

As Unions21 celebrates its 20th anniversary British trade unions are again faced with an anti-union Government that seeks to undermine the advances made by trade unions for working people over the past 150 years. The union movement needs to face up to that challenge and I am sure that Unions21 has an important role to play in providing the space for trade unionists to generate ideas and strategies on how to do so.

Sarah Ward

Inspiring debates and discussion

ORGANISING MY first ever Unions21 annual conference (1998) was the scariest thing I'd ever done. I remember physically falling out of bed in the night before conference, I was so anxious. Of course, I had brilliant support. Nina Temple guided me with her considerable wisdom and experience, and the Executive Committee (Chaired

by Hilary Benn) was filled with loyal and enthusiastic trade unionists who knew what they were doing.

I was very fortunate to start my career listening to the Unions21 Exec Committee talk about the challenges facing their unions. The union politics, the personality politics, gossip on mergers, you name it. I was inducted into a club where the aural tradition ran strong. These debates and discussions were inspiring because they didn't end in despair or shrugs of shoulders; they demanded research, and further thought. Could we do a discussion paper? Do we need a seminar? What are other people doing about this? Having the space to consider these things is so precious. And that's what Unions21 is all about.

Unions21 remains an important vehicle for ideas and debate in this great movement of ours. My role as a National Officer at Prospect underlines for me that the pressure on Trade Unionists is greater than ever. The challenge remains for us to demonstrate our relevance and influence, particularly in such economically challenging times. We've more to do if we're to be truly representative of the diverse and flexible workforce that increasingly exists, across both public and private sectors. There are different solutions for different employers and



different groups of members. Unions21 allows those of us committed to the principles of collective bargaining, of respect at work and of giving employees a voice, to explore those different solutions and find what works for us. It's also about the bigger picture, which is hard to see sometimes when you're battling away.

So as we celebrate 20 years of Unions21 it's clear to me that we'll always need time to stop and think, to learn and explore. I look forward to celebrating many more anniversaries.

Hilary Benn MP

So many things to talk about

I FIRST got involved when I was working for MSF and was asked to go along to a meeting by Roger Lyons. I had no idea what it was all about, but what I found was

years old

a lively group of people and a great idea; providing a space in which trade unionists could come together to think about the future of unions. In this, Unions21 was unique; there was nowhere else in the union movement where this type of conversation was taking place.

One of the other characteristics of Unions21 was that it had no formal 'position' and therefore could not be captured by anyone for a particular purpose. So those who took part did so because they were interested in the debate and not because they thought they could achieve a particular outcome. There were so many things to talk about. How should we respond to a changing economy? What could be done to organise better in the new workplaces? How did unions need to change the way they operate? And we asked these and many other questions by publishing articles, encouraging discussion and holding meetings and conferences.

We met sometimes at 6 Cynthia Street and other times at the TUC, with John Monks always very supportive. For, on occasions, a rather hand to mouth organisation, we certainly had an impact, and the highlight of the year was, and is, always the annual conference at Congress House. Labour frontbenchers, trade union leaders, and others like Will Hutton really wanted to come along. As, too, did John Cridland of the CBI who marked himself out as being very willing to get involved.

But above all I remember the people it was such a privilege to work with. Nina Temple, Mike Power, Nina Fishman, Jim McAuslan, Ken Penton, Martin O'Donovan and lots and lots of others who gave of their time and their enthusiasm.

Unions21 has achieved a lot in its short life so far, and although I may possibly be otherwise engaged when Unions22 gets launched, I wish it every continuing success!

Dan Whittle

True to its founding ideals

I TOOK over as Director of Unions21 from Matt Ball in 2008, with Paul Day as Vice Chair and Sue Ferns as Chair.

The organisation has remained true to its founding ideals – supporting the campaigning role of the trade union movement, building a positive relationship with politicians, and continuing to provide a valuable and important "open space" for discussion.

Since 2008 we've seen Unions21 grow – with our treasurer Chris Weavers processing the affiliation of unions as diverse as Equity, PFA, RCM, RCN, BECTU, HCSA and the MU. So that now we can say, not only is Unions21 focused on supporting unions fit for the 21st Century, but we are an organisation supported by over 21 unions. Alongside this, the backing of a growing number of senior trade unionists across all unions, Labour politicians, and academics continues to boost the strength of our network.



Though our values are the same as in 1992, the issues have changed.

The new priority of improving union image and communications, particularly to fully exploit the opportunities presented by the internet, has led to research, seminars and publications. Speakers included Billy Ivory script-writer for the film 'Made in Dagenham', who challenged unions to tell stories that surprise people about what we are capable of.

The need to address low union membership amongst young people led to focus group research jointly funded by the TUC which identified tough lessons and home truths for unions.

Through the economic downturn Unions21 has tracked the impact of cuts and hostile Government policies, providing evidence of where union action has had greatest positive impact, particularly for young people.

Unions21 remained ahead of the curve in exploring new innovations in organising, including union community organising.

For the larger part of 2012, the role of Director was held by Jenny Simms, Jenny handed it back in better shape than ever.

Since my return to the role, an action plan for Unions21 jointly produced with Jenny has led to initiatives including the Unions21 blog 'UnionHome', which has extended the Unions21 "open space" to the internet – challenging unions and their members to discuss ideas openly and instantly.

The Fair Work Commission has begun to look at how we ensure the economic recovery is a fair one. Commissioners Sue Ferns, Lesley Mercer, Manuel Cortes, Carl Roper, Lord John Monks, Byron Taylor and John Park have focused on how we create the conditions for improved job quality and justice at work.

It's in the interest of all trade unions that Unions21's resources, role and reach continue to grow in years to come. We are able to do so because of the firm foundations built in the last two decades.

■ For the full articles visit:
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EVENTS

Unions21 stand at the CSP Annual Conference in Manchester

4 March 2013 – Palace Hotel

Fair Work Commission roundtable with Chuka Umunna MP

5 March 2013 – Invitation only

Annual Conference 2013 – Strong Unions, Turning the Tide

8 March 2013 – TUC Council Chamber

Keynote speakers:

Frances O'Grady – TUC General Secretary

Jon Cruddas MP – Co-ordinator of Labour's Policy Review

Unions21 Fringe at ATL Conference

25th March 2013 – Liverpool

Unions21 stand at the NASUWT conference

29 March 2013 – BIC Bournemouth

Unions21 Fringe at STUC Annual Conference

17 April 2013

Fair Work – Perth Concert Hall, Earn Room, 12.30 pm – 2.00 pm

Fair Work Commission Roundtable at STUC

17 April 2013

10.00 – 11.30 Perth Concert Hall, Earn Room – Invitation only

Fringe at Society of Radiographers Annual Conference

Building Union Community Coalitions
22 April 2013 – Brighton

Unions21 Fringe at Community Conference: Fair Work

2 July 2013 – Hotel De France, Jersey

Refreshments are provided at all events unless specified, event updates are on: www.Unions21.org.uk For more information email dwhittle@atl.org.uk

Unions 21

FIGHTING FOR FAIRNESS

FROM FRONT PAGE

absence of effective consultation between employers and unions could have a significant impact on staff morale and employment relations. They were able to collect responses in more than 80 workplaces with experience of recent or proposed redundancies. In half of these cases, union reps reported that staff morale and relations with management had clearly been damaged by the experience.

Jo Ellen Grzyb, counsellor and psychotherapist at employment communications consultancy Impact Factory, says change, by its very nature, breeds uncertainty. She said: "During this uncertainty, the decision-makers tend to spend all their attention and focus on the logistics of survival. What they tend to ignore is the impact any change will have on the majority of their employees. They don't mean to, but people on the receiving end can feel ignored, taken for granted and marginalised."

Therefore, the time that the current limit on collective redundancy consultation allows is vital. Not only does listening bring out the creativity in most people, it helps engage them and get their commitment during the early stages of the process rather than trying to haul them and their resistance on board once all the decisions have been made.

Livelihoods

Perhaps most importantly of all, a 90 day period gives workers who may face cuts in their pay time to adjust their financial arrangements, for example by speaking to their mortgage lender. We must remember, that it is people's livelihoods that are at risk not just job titles within a firm.

Ministers are wrong to suggest that by shortening the notice period, the outcome will be a better process. Instead, the change will make matters harder for both employers and employees. It takes time for unions and employers to consider carefully what alternatives there may be to job losses and what the impact on the remaining workforce will be. As the Law Society have pointed out "The danger of a reduction in minimum periods is that this will place undue pressure on all those involved, with a detrimental impact upon workplace relations." Those opposed to the Government's proposals must now come together to push against the tidal wave which is washing away people's rights at work.

Ian Murray is Shadow Minister for Employment Relations, Consumer and Postal Affairs and MP for Edinburgh South

How strong unions are turning the tide

TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady says unions have huge potential



WE ARE two years from an election. This makes it a crucial period for the work of unions and the TUC. There is much to campaign against, as the effects of austerity economics really start to bite across the country and our communities.

Living standards are stagnant. And while the total unemployment count has never gone as high as the terrible growth figures suggest, we still have a jobs crisis. Millions are under-employed in jobs below their capabilities, working part-time when they want a full-time job or scraping along in marginal self-employment. A whole generation of young people is being scarred by lack of opportunity.

Spending cuts are now really hurting. We can see their effect in the NHS. Local authorities across the country warn that soon they will not even be able to supply services the law requires, let alone 'optional' activities such as the youth service or the arts – all the things that glue communities together.

Ministers got away for a long time with persuading people that their cuts to benefits were simply about cracking down on 'scroungers' and people cheating the system. But that is beginning to shift, as people see that the big majority losing out are in work. As the media report people losing their homes, and changes to council tax benefit in April that will have the same effect as the poll tax on millions of lower paid workers, the idea that 'we are all in this together' is laughable.

Unions have an important role in resisting these changes. We are Britain's biggest voluntary movement. We have direct power in workplaces, but also huge potential in communities. Nor should we underestimate the TUC's national voice. We may rarely get the credit but it was TUC commissioned research on tax that kicked off the whole campaign against tax avoidance

and evasion. Every politician is now keen to talk about the squeezed middle, but again it was TUC research that made clear that huge numbers had not just been hit by the slump, but been excluded from prosperity even in the years when the economy appeared to be growing.

I want union campaigning to be on a twin track in the run up to the next election and beyond. We should continue to resist government measures that make those who did nothing to cause the crash pay to clear it up. And we can make a difference as we have done with plans to implement regional pay or defeating most of the attacks on employee rights in the Beecroft Report.

A big part of this in the year ahead needs to be work to expose just how much damage austerity economics are doing to the nation's social and economic fabric. We need big campaigns for a living wage, and to reverse the fall in living standards. Too many have been suffering in silence – ministers need to be held to account for policies that harm the vulnerable.

But just as important needs to be work to set an agenda for the future. When the economy crashed in 2008, it was not just a normal slow-down but the failure of the dominant economic model practised in the USA and the UK for the previous 30 or so years. Winding the clock back to pre-crash business as usual is not just unattractive, but impossible.

No-one can yet know the full details of what the next wave of economic success will look like. But we can see many of its elements. There needs to be a new industrial policy which abandons the neglect of recent years. A big focus for that must be decarbonising the economy – global warming is not going to wait politely while we sort out the economy. High pay and wealth at the top does not trickle down to the rest of us, and building a fairer society with well-paid skilled jobs is key. There needs to be a big shake-up of finance with banks that work for the rest of the economy not just for top bankers.

And after decades when markets ruled and managers asserted their right to manage in the interests of short-term shareholder gain, it is also time to rediscover the union interest in industrial democracy. There is already wide support for a worker voice on remuneration committees, as one way of taming top pay, but we should not stop there.

So we need to get busy (or more accurately, even busier). Our victories show that we can resist the worst of what government can throw at us – especially when we work with allies – but we also need to get positive in setting out how we build a fair economy – or as the TUC's campaign slogan has it – a future that works.