



2008

Saturday, 8th March

International Women's Day

www.internationalwomensday.com

International Women's Day events have been occurring all around the world each year on 8th March and in just three years time, 2011, we will see the day celebrate its Centenary – 100 years of women's united action for global equality and change.

These events range from fairly small, randomly organised, informal gatherings, to large scale highly organised and publicised events. The day is an opportunity to promote women's achievements and to consider what still remains to be done. If you are involved in such an event, either through work or through your own community, let us know.

Here in the UK many companies and unions have actively supported International Women's Day and women's advancement for many years. For Unite this is essential if we are to recruit and retain female members and lay reps that are the lifeblood of our movement. Like many companies, Unite has had to take account of the changing world of work and the huge population of women now in the workplace and consider its policies and activities to ensure that they are relevant to everyone.

This leaflet is aimed at our women members so that we can highlight some of the issues we are working on and some of the successes that our activists are experiencing from day-to-day.

Trade Unions: the key for women in the workplace

by Alison Jones, Organiser

The presence of a trade union and collective bargaining is a key determination for best practice in the workplace. Research has shown that there is more likely to be a greater awareness and compliance with employment rights where workers are represented by trade unions.

Negotiating good agreements often includes promoting equal opportunities and TUC audit reports have shown that collective agreements help to deliver equality in the workplace as there is a strong correlation between the level of bargaining and the gender pay gap. Women earn more than their non-unionised colleagues in the same job, enjoy better benefits and greater job protection. Workplaces that have a union presence are also likely to have a better work/life balance and provide a key role in protection against discrimination.

continued overleaf

International Women's Day from previous years – supported by women around the world.

Photographs courtesy of www.internationalwomensday.com



continued from front page

Women trade unionists have played a major part in these achievements and helped to campaign and drive through the agenda for employment changes that have a significant impact on women in the workplace. From the equal pay act, protection for part-time and pregnant workers, time off for dependants and the right to ask for flexible working, regulations that significantly affect female workers have been introduced. Undoubtedly trade unions' philosophy surrounds fairness and equality for all, but the presence of active female trade union members ensures that issues that have particular adverse effects on women workers are raised. Studies demonstrate that inequality in the workplace, however, still exists – therefore campaigning needs to continue.

Women occupy a mass presence in the UK working population and as employees many recognise the importance of being in an independent trade union. However, once they have made this choice they are less likely than their male colleagues to play an active part in their union. The reason



for this is not that they care less about having a voice at work and a say over their terms and conditions, but more likely linked to practical reasons such as family responsibilities, part time hours, etc. Of course these barriers can affect all workers but with the UK having the second largest rate of part-time workers being women, it is disproportional towards female workers. Union organisations, whether at workplace, local or national level, are working hard to ensure that they are as inclusive as possible and actively promote representation for all members.

The future introduction of union equality representatives in the workplace will produce a positive impact for union members however; improvements can be made now by more female union members taking an active part in their union. This can involve being nominated

for union representative positions or just attending meetings and ensuring that your opinions are heard. If your union is not organised and not representing your views, then take an opportunity to change this. It's your union.

We can be proud of new 'Dignity At Work' deals

Tony Burke, Unite Assistant General Secretary

Last year Unite unveiled a new and modernised National Agreement for the papermaking industry. The agreement between Unite and the Confederation of Paper Industries, similar to the agreement reached with the BPIF in commercial printing, contains agreements and good practice on Dignity at Work and issues surrounding equalities.



Unite members working in the papermaking sector voted overwhelmingly in favour of the modernised agreement which provided the template for a successful future for the UK's paper industry. Other unions, at home and abroad, have asked for copies of the agreement which has been described as "groundbreaking".

The Dignity At Work Agreement recognises the changes that have taken place within the papermaking industry over the last few years and states that companies should ensure that "working practices are modern and suited to the values of the twenty-first century. Employment practices similarly need to reflect modern values and best practice in workplace relations".

The agreement also says that "everyone in the workplace should be valued as a person and treated with dignity and respect, given every opportunity to contribute to the success of the business, treated fairly in a way that is consistent with others but taking account of their individual needs".

The deal outlaws bullying and harassment in the workplace and says that companies should ensure that their policies, training and standards of conduct, help achieve the right working environment.

Diversity in the workplace is encouraged and all companies should have a clear statement of, and policy on, diversity together with employment practices that foster an inclusive workplace.

The day-to-day struggle for members in bringing up their families is also addressed with clear policies which encourage companies to conduct on-going reviews of the impact of their work and employment practices on work-life balance, paying particular attention to working hours, overtime working and shift patterns to ensure a healthy well-balanced approach, with opportunities for flexible and part-time working in the design of shift patterns, particularly in accommodating the needs of parents with young children or carers of elderly or special need dependants.

We can be proud that we have achieved the new agreement with the CPI and the BPIF, that these issues are at the heart of the new agreements and that all concerned are addressing the issue of Dignity at Work and Equalities in a positive manner.

UNITE E-BULLETINS

Unite members working in the Graphical, Paper & Media Sector can get regular e-bulletins by visiting www.amicustheunion.org/Default.aspx?page=2957

Just send an email to ashraf.choudhury@unitetheunion.com to receive a four page downloadable newsletter on what's happening in the Unite GPM sector. You can also sign up for a regular Health & Safety e-bulletin.

Regular e-bulletins from Unite are available on the main Unite (Amicus) website at

www.amicustheunion.org/Default.aspx?page=3644

Other Useful websites:

www.eoc.org.uk – Equal Opportunities Commission

www.cre.org.uk – Commission For Racial Equality

www.equalityhumanrights.com – Equality and Human Rights Commission

Further information on work-life balance can be found at:

www.dti.gov.uk/work-lifebalance

www.tuc.org.uk/work-life www.tuc.org.uk/changingtimes

www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk

Dignity At Work Partnership: Europe's Largest Project

Tackling bullying at work early and effectively through a robust policy can make all the difference to the lives of many workers who are affected both emotionally and physically by bullying behaviour in the work place. There are also important benefits to a business which is free from a culture of bullying and harassment

Tony Burke, Assistant General Secretary, and Siobhan Endean, coordinator of the Unite Dignity at Work Partnership, look at some of the important issues

More than two million people across the UK are currently being bullied at work costing the UK economy £2 billion annually in absenteeism, staff turnover and sick days.

Since its inception many high profile organisations have signed up to Dignity at Work including BAE Systems, BT, the Chemical Industries Association, Legal & General, Remploy and Royal Mail which covers over one million UK employees. Unite is delighted that the British Print Industry Federation has also signed up to a new dignity at work agreement with the union.

The aim of the project is for employers and employee representatives to work together to find ways of addressing the issues around bullying.

Siobhan Endean, Head of Equality at Unite, says: "Since workplace bullying was recognised as a problem more than a decade ago, many organisations have adopted policies to address the issue. We are looking at what has worked, not just here in the UK, but elsewhere around the world. We have brought together the best examples and developed guidance on them which is available to download from our website www.dignityatwork.org."

Tony Burke, Unite Assistant General Secretary, added: "A policy is no use unless all parties work together to take on the challenge."

If we can learn from one another, we can avoid mistakes and in this way, Dignity at Work values will thrive. I am delighted that we will be working with employers across the print sector to provide dignity at work training.

"Simply saying that bullying and harassment has got to stop is not enough. It has to be backed by action and must also be seen to be visibly supported by the most senior people in the company, as this helps to get the message across to staff that we are serious about this issue. Furthermore, an effective policy with appropriate outcomes is also vital."

"I agree, an effective anti-bullying policy is essential," says Siobhan. "Bullying is widespread and causes serious problems which none of us can afford to ignore."

"An effective approach should provide employees with a safe reporting system that will protect them from potential retribution. It should state the definition of bullying, explain that bullying will not be tolerated, that it will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence and that confidentiality will be guaranteed. In the policy, employees should also be encouraged to contact their trade union representatives as well as the personnel department responsible for implementation of the policy," explains Siobhan.

Employers are legally obliged to protect their employees from bullying and harassment. However, even in organisations with clearly defined policies to tackle bullying and harassment many employees may still face barriers when it comes to reporting it. That is why support from your trade union representative is so important when it comes to dealing with bullying.

If you are experiencing bullying at work then contact your work place rep. They will be able to advise you on the best way to deal with the bullying, whether it be through raising the issue informally or formally. Don't continue to suffer on your own.



Women getting involved at Pearson Distribution

Pearson members gained union recognition in 2000 and since then the Chapel Committee have continually encouraged members to participate in their union and become Union Reps – in 2008 half of the committee are women.

They all agree that the reason they got involved in the union was to ensure that they had a voice at work, and equality issues were kept on the agenda.

Karen, Aleksandra and Sian are enthusiastic about getting more women active in learning. "Many women are keen to learn new skills or taking up a new interest but as many have commitments outside of work they often do not have the time to find out about the learning opportunities available to them. That's where we can help, we can find out about courses they are interested in, and offer help and support for them to get back into learning."

Patrycja joined the Committee last year. "My FOC encouraged me to become active in the Union. I was hesitant at first but eventually agreed. I attended one of the union's training courses where I learnt so much and met other new reps which made me feel much more at ease."



Back: Christine Pearce, Workplace Rep; Patrycja Jenkins, Workplace Rep; Sian Owen, Union Learner Rep; Aleksandra Lis, Union Learner Rep.
Front: Karen Stewart, Union Learner Rep; Val Lines, Workplace Rep.

Kathy Helps Win Recognition at Derry News

by Joanne McWilliams, Organiser

Following a sustained organising campaign in Derry News, part of the River Media Group, the Industrial Court has granted recognition to Unite the Union.

The Derry News was established in February 2001, and was acquired by River Media in July 2006. Over the last six years Derry News has grown from a small family concern to a prosperous business and the membership has grown with it.

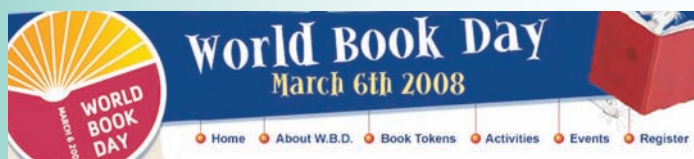
Kathy Feeney is our Representative in the Derry News and has been a member of the union for the last two years. She has worked in the Derry News for six years and has seen it grow to what it is today. Kathy says that the reason she joined the union was that she could see the changes slowly happening, with extra responsibilities being handed out but with no extra money, extra hours also expected to be worked but again with no extra money.

"Slowly but surely the employer was just taking away our terms and conditions until before you knew it you were in a job you barely recognised. I knew then it was time to get the union involved," said Kathy. "We currently sit at over 65% membership and we expect more to join once the recognition agreement has been signed. We now have members in every department from printing to sales and administration and I am sure that we can create an organisation that will deliver real benefits to our new members."

Steve Sibbald, National Officer, said: "This is another step in continuing the re-recognition of the newspaper industry throughout the UK."

Joanne McWilliams, Regional Organiser, said: "This Organising campaign was a great success for the members and could not have succeeded without their support and, indeed, involvement, throughout. It only goes to prove that member-lead campaigns work. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Kathy for all her dedication and hard work in helping make this a success and also for giving up a lot of her free time to attend meetings. We could not have done this without her and the ongoing organising campaign which all our members in the Derry News are involved in."

Kathy said: "I feel prepared and good in the knowledge that I no longer need to fight these battles on my own, that I have the union behind me, and will soon receive training on Union Representation which again will only strengthen our position. I am looking forward to a brighter future knowing that I now have a voice in my workplace and would encourage others to get involved in the union."



On 6th March Unite played its part in World Book Day by encouraging all workplaces to organise a book event or display. It is intended that this will continue throughout the year and that reps will organise book shelves or centres at their workplace to exchange, display or just give away books.

This year ten new Quick Reads titles have been introduced and include titles by bestselling authors and celebrities, including Adele Parks, Gordon Ramsey, Colin Jackson and John Bird. In the last three years, Quick Reads have firmly established themselves as the perfect books for people who have lost the reading habit or who struggle to read long and complicated books. Above all, they prove that reading can be fun. The Union has purchased a set of display stands that contain 60 books written for adults and over 200 children's books for each Regional Office. Encourage your employer to make available a set of Quick Read books.

For more information visit www.worldbookday.com

How does the employment future lie for young people?

This is a question asked by many parents who want to see a brighter future for their children, as we live in times of change – a change towards low pay and poor opportunity jobs in an increasingly casualised economy which is spreading insecurity amongst a new generation of workers. My advice? Tell them about the benefits of joining a trade union.



Unite the Union has done a lot of work in meeting the challenges that face young workers heading into the world of work. One of the initiatives recently launched was the young members' network, which enabled us to invite young members to attend regional weekend seminars to find out more about Unite and how to get elected as a work place rep. We also encouraged existing workplace reps and shop stewards to mentor the young members to allow them to establish themselves as the next generation of activists.

Through the Young Reps Project, we are providing young members and workplace reps with a toolkit and training to lead induction sessions for young people, at work and in schools and colleges, to explain why they should join a trade union.

But the work of a young work place rep is not all about pay, skills and workplace issues. Young members have been encouraged to get involved in talking to other young people about the benefits of joining the union in schools and colleges. They are also getting involved in the fight against racism and fascism and international solidarity campaigns. Young members are also taking activism to another level, through social networking such as Facebook, where the Unite group recently raised the profile of the campaign for union recognition at Kettle Crisps.

Graham Goddard, Deputy General Secretary, (above), says: "Unite is the union for the future, we have over 45,000 members under the age of 27 and our union is tackling the issues that affect them at work. Temporary and agency work, low pay, lack of training opportunities and pensions all affect our young members more. Our young reps project is providing a voice for young people at work and I would encourage you to get involved and make a difference."

So play your part in this exciting new adventure which is trade unionism. Ask your children if they know what a trade union is. Tell them what you know, and if you don't know enough, then visit our website: www.uniteunion.com