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UNISON conference 2022

UNISON delegates hear that much-improved public sector pay and a 'realistic' windfall tax are the key to the cost of living crisis



'Now is the time for investment, not cuts'

UNISON delegates turned the focus of the cost of living crisis squarely towards the solution - a "realistic windfall tax" on energy companies and greater taxation on the country's wealthiest people.

With inflation at its highest level for 30 years, a composite motion identified the combined effect on members' lives of a cost of living that was 'going through the roof' and the decade-long stagnation in public sector pay.

The motion also noted the disproportionate impact of inflation on the low paid, who have to spend a greater proportion of their income on essentials such as food and energy bills.

Proposing the motion, Lilian

Macer of Scotland region condemned the UK government for its response, saying that it was "socially and economically foolish to tackle the cost of living crisis by attacking public services."

She added: "Now is the time for investment, not cuts. Price rises are not a force of nature, but a political decision. It's about private greed, not public need. "Members are not the cause of inflation, but the victims of inflation. We should not allow the greed at the top to drive down

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conditions for the rest of us.”

Members are ‘desperate’

Ms Macer noted that the combined wealth of the top 250 people on the Sunday Times Rich List was £711 billion.

“The money to fund services is there. What we are lacking is the political will to levy taxes and to collect them.”

She then urged delegates to attend the TUC’s cost of living march and rally in London on Saturday. “What we absolutely need to do is coordinate our campaign and make sure the government hears the voice of our members.”

Jane Gebbie of Cymru/Wales told delegates of just one of her members, whose current struggles would be shared by so many. A medical secretary who had worked in the health service for 17 years, the member has been forced to re-mortgage her home and can not afford to feed her children.

“She’s desperate,” Ms Gebbie said, adding it was “vitally important” for the union to win pay rises for members that would help them cover cost of living increases.

Greta Holmes of the NEC told delegates that in a recent survey one fifth of UNISON members said they were looking for another job, because their wages don’t reflect their cost of living.

“It’s time for them to get what they need, and what they deserve,” she said.

Building an alliance

Martin Gallagher for the national retired members’ committee said that pensioners were among the groups being hardest hit by the rising bills.

“The cost of living crisis is affecting the young, the not so young and the old,” he said. “All of us need to come together to fight it. We must build an alliance across the generations.”

The motion notes that improved public sector wages is “an effective form of economic stimulus, providing growth that has a tangible effect in local communities.”

In voting for the motion, delegates called on the NEC to:

- Coordinate support across the union in

support of fair pay rises which will defend members’ standard of living;

- Provide maximum support to members submitting pay claims and embarking upon industrial action including, where appropriate, coordination of campaign activity with sister unions across public services;
- Produce briefings of the key facts and issues of the campaign and provide this to branches, along with info graphics and visual materials that can be used on social media and newsletters;
- Issues case studies that can be used to demonstrate and humanise campaign material;
- Work with regions to support the running of regional activist workshops as part of the pay campaign, to help spread good practice and further inform future publicity and campaign events;
- Assist in securing decent pay awards by lending the weight of the entire union to proactive campaigns on pay – that start from an expectation of employer and government hostility – and seek to organise and mobilise members across service groups to capitalise on pressure points such as local elections or high-profile events;
- Work with the national retired members’ committee to build an alliance across the generations on cost of living issues.