

TUC

General secretary tells delegates in Brighton that UNISON will be working with other unions to help working people get the pay rise that they deserve



‘Co-ordinated action unites us,’ McAnea tells TUC congress

“Our purpose binds us - co-ordinated action unites us.” That was the message at the heart of Christina McAnea’s speech to the TUC’s annual congress, as she moved a successful UNISON motion on *Higher pay to tackle the cost of living crisis*.

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The general secretary had opened by telling delegates that she had been on a picket line recently in Blackpool. It was “early one morning, in the wind and the rain ...

“I was talking to our UNISON members. Most of them were cleaners, caterers or porters, who work in the hospital but for a private company - OCS.

“They don’t get full NHS pay and conditions, and even during the

pandemic - working Christmas day - they only got flat rate pay.

“Their ask was reasonable: pay parity with the directly-employed workers doing the same job.

Ms McAnea said that she had asked one of members how she travelled to the picket line so early.

The member replied that she walked. An hour to work/the picket line and an hour home.

"Because she could no longer afford the bus fare."

That, said the general secretary, was the reality that was forcing people take strike action even when it meant losing pay.

She continued by telling the hall: "The picture inside our NHS hospitals is not much prettier. Almost 30% of employers have set up foodbanks to help feed their staff and another 20% are planning to bring it in."

It was, said Ms McAnea, "a shameful period in our history."

She reported that a care worker, forced to work 60-70 hours a week to pay her debts, had asked: "Is this life, what do you think?"

The general secretary told congress that, while working people have struggled through austerity, a deadly pandemic and are now in a devastating cost of living crisis, they face a repeat of the "penny-pinching austerity" inflicted on the country since 2010.

"Meanwhile, the UK government has been playing roulette, racking up debt on the public tab.

"All their gambling always ending with the same result - working people lose out."

And she had surprising words of thanks for Conservative MP Sir Crispin Blunt, for his wise words over the weekend, agreeing that, "Yes, 'the game is up'."

But Ms McAnea said that "this should never have been a game, because it's far too serious for that."

With the government trying desperately to blame someone or something other than itself, it was time for it to take responsibility for a decade of spending cuts, for the political choices that have made the economy weaker and working people poorer.

The latest, desperate chaos at the heart of government she said was not "desperation to save the country, but desperation to save the Tory Party."

But the party is sinking in the polls as mortgage repayments, energy bills, and food and travel costs are up.

"The country can't take any more," said Ms

McAnea. "Workers can't take any more. Only a general election ... can get rid of this lot of chancers".

She then turned her attention to the people who are putting the interests of working people first: trade unionists.

And emphasising that UNISON already works with other unions, she made the message clear: "Our purpose binds us - co-ordinated action unites us".