

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

18 June demo

From the frontline to the breadline - thousands of UNISON members join other trade unions to protest the cost of living crisis



UNISON members 'demand better' on London's streets

UNISON joined unions from across sectors for the TUC's Demand Better rally and march, which saw tens of thousands hit London's streets on Saturday 18 June.

The strong sea of purple and green, led by general secretary Christina McAnea, gathered at Portland Place before proudly and loudly setting off on the march to Parliament Square.

Tens of thousands gathered in the square for a rally which saw a raft of speakers, including three from UNISON.

'Forwards ever, backwards never.'

Gloria Mills, UNISON's national secretary for equalities and chair of the TUC race relations committee, was the first of the UNISON speakers.

She opened her speech telling the packed Parliament Square: "We're here to resist. We need to stand up now and demand that the government protect the public purse. It is not a piggy bank for corporations and for Tory cronies.

"But we also need to send solidarity to all the workers in the UK who have been fighting to end privatisation and get their jobs back in-house, and send our congratulations to all of them who have already won the insourcing of their jobs."

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Using Amazon as an example of new frontlines in trade unionism, she said: "We are demanding an end to racial segregation of the labour market.

"We have seen how pernicious it is in this country and in America. And one of the biggest wins for the Amazon labour union is an end to the racial segregation in their company, where black people are stuck to the floor and the ceiling is so low that you cannot rise at any level in that organisation."

She continued: "We are standing up and demanding an end to the gender pay gap and we are demanding an end to the disability pay gap.

"And we are supporting our LGBT+ workers to have full equality, dignity and respect in the workplace. And we are demanding no more precarious employment, no zero-hour contracts. We want access to good jobs and pensions."

Ms Mills finished her speech saying: "And I want to say comrades, let us continue this fight. Together we will win, we will speak up, we will stand up and we will be counted, and you will hear us louder. Enough is enough.

"Forwards ever, backwards never."

'There is no recognition of your value, it is an absolute disgrace.'

Lyn Marie O'Hara (above), a member of UNISON's NEC and a key leader in the Glasgow fair pay strikes, spoke next for UNISON. She commented how it was "an amazing day, for the people and the workers who are out here in the streets."

She spoke of her experiences being seconded to UNISON over the last three years and representing the low-paid workers in the Glasgow fair pay strikes.

Those workers were, "not being paid fairly to begin with, and a half a billion pounds settlement, so far, evidences that fact," she said. "But now we have the cost of living crisis or 'cost of capitalism crisis'.

"The cost of living has gone through the roof and you're not getting paid fairly or squarely. There is no recognition of your value, it is an absolute disgrace. We have to address the fact

that people need better pay to go to work every day and deliver essential services."

Speaking of the impact of members during COVID-19, Ms O'Hara said: "The people who I represent could not work from home. That's no disrespect to the people who did keep things running behind the scenes, but my members were out there, cleaning." And she asked the rally: "When does cleaner become a job with a capital C, like a Doctor or like an MP has capitals letters.

"Cleaners and your caterers and your janitors, your educational support staff, home care, social work, the list is endless of the people who are out there sacrificing their lives every single day and not getting paid in recognition of their value in society."

'We are resolute, we are strong and we are up for the fight.'

General secretary Christina McAnea finished the union's speeches at the rally, saying: "It's so fantastic to see so many people here."

She spoke of the moment she heard everybody shouting while passing Downing Street. "That's what it's all about. It's about us saying to them, 'We demand better, and we will not put up with the rubbish that you give us day in day out'.

"They do not understand us, because they are not like us. You think of some of the mad things they've done - the £840 wallpaper, the £20,000 to build a swimming pool in Rishi Sunak's garden. Who does stuff like that? Not us."

She argued that the excuse being given - that the economy would be ruined by public sector pay rises - fell flat. "How many of you go out and spend your pay rises on stocks and shares? Or buying second homes? Nobody. You spend it in your local communities and you rebuild your local high streets, that's what we do."

She asked the rally to, "Think back to the worst days of the pandemic. The people who were holding the hands of dying patients in hospitals and care homes were our members, while [the government] were partying in Downing Street, an utter disgrace."

On the topic of strike action, she said: "I frequently get asked by journalists, 'But surely your members, people who are care workers and NHS workers and social workers, they won't really take strike action, will they?' Well yes, they will.

"Just next week, we have a strike in the South West of a group of our care workers who work in St Monica's Trust. Shame on the employer, they're introducing 'fire and rehire tactics', and our care worker members are taking strike action and will have the full backing not just of our union but, I'm sure, of everybody here."

Calling the rally to action, Ms McAnea concluded: "The strong message we send out from today is that we are resolute, we are strong and we are up for the fight.

"But we have to work together within our own unions and also across the labour and union movement. Once we get that done, we as a movement can take back control, we can tell these Tories that we will not put up with it any longer.

"Thank you so much and keep up the fight!"