

The Update

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The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

UNISON Conference

UNISON renews campaigning commitment to a greener and more equal future



‘We must be the generation that rebuilds after the pandemic’

Delegates at UNISON’s conference discussed the key issues that needed to be addressed as society emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic - notably pay, equality and climate change.

The motion Securing an equal and sustainable post pandemic settlement notes that that the UK faces a comparable choice to that one faced after the second world war - to return to how things were before, or create a better future.

“That choice is clear,” it states, “and the moment must be seized as an opportunity to tackle the deep fault lines so cruelly exposed by the pandemic.... Put simply, those who were already at the sharp end of pre-existing

inequalities related to class, educational outcomes, income, geography and ethnicity have suffered most.”

In moving the motion for the national executive council (NEC), UNISON vice president James Anthony told delegates: “We need a society that recognises the value of public services, a society that ensures that our work life is safe, a society that is sustainable, and one that works together to stop climate

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change.

"We must be the generation that rebuilds after the pandemic. This is our vision – this is our mission."

Patrick Hunter of Barnet branch spoke of the increasing threat to public service workers post-pandemic. "We can't afford to allow our members to be scapegoated and carry the financial can for COVID." He said. "We need those who can afford it to pay more."

Amina Patel of Tower Hamlets spoke of the attempts by numerous employers, including her own, Labour council, to sack and rehire on lesser terms and conditions. "I'm sick of politicians who slap us on the back one moment, then slap us in the face with cuts to conditions, jobs and services."

Sarah Carter of North Yorkshire local government said: "We can't continue to accept the status quo. We can't continue to live with such shocking levels of inequality in this country."

Ms Carter spoke of families struggling to put food on the table and pay their bills, members forced to use food banks, and the particular pressures on women workers and those working in the private sector on inferior pay and conditions.

"We now face a real risk of a lost generation due to this pandemic," she said. "Our future depends on whether we're able to tackle inequality."

Jon Woods from Portsmouth City branch underlined the fact that "climate change does not recognise national borders" and that UNISON's work to avoid a climate catastrophe needed to be international in outlook.

In closing the debate, Mr Anthony added: "We've spent too long defending and holding onto what we have got. This [motion] is a clear vision for rebuilding our society – making things better for members, making sure that public service workers that have got us through this crisis come back out of it with something worth fighting for."

Conference charged the union to develop an ambitious campaign calling for a post-COVID world built around the following pillars:

- Sustainable long-term investment in all of public services
- Decent pay and reward for the union's members and all working people
- The creation of a fair and equal society
- Economic policies that create a greener and more sustainable economy, ensuring a just transition for all while solving the climate emergency.

Internationally, the NEC should campaign on a number of issues, including the introduction of debt relief and debt restructuring for the most vulnerable economies, and the reform and strengthening of international bodies such as the World Health Organisation, in order to champion and strengthen quality public health services globally.