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Equality reps make a difference

In workplaces up and down the UK, a growing army of new union reps is working hard to ensure their workplaces become fairer, more equal places to work, says a report published on the 21st January by the TUC.

By the end of March, there will be some 1,400 equality reps active in both private and public sectors. Last year the TUC received funding from the Union Modernisation Fund to set up a special project to co-ordinate the recruitment of equality reps and to find out more about the impact reps are having on their workplaces.

The resulting report, *The TUC Union Equality Representatives Survey 2009* found that almost two-thirds of equality reps are located in the public sector, 32% in the private sector, and 3% in the voluntary sector. Unsurprisingly, the amount of time equality reps get to spend on their duties has a corresponding impact on how effective they believe their efforts are in the

workplace, 24% can only spare one hour a week and some complain of having no time at all.

The survey suggests almost two-thirds of reps believe that their employer gives them sufficient time off to carry out their equality responsibilities, but the remaining 36 per cent feel they don't get nearly enough time to do the things their role requires them to do.

Commenting on the report, TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: 'Introducing a statutory duty giving equality reps the same right to take time out for their union duties as shop stewards and safety reps would make a real difference. Unions had hoped Government would introduce this new right and we are disappointed that this will not happen this side of an election.'

The TUC Union Equality Representatives Survey 2009 contains several case studies and is available at www.tuc.org.uk/extras/equalityrepssurvey.pdf



Equality Matters

Communication Workers Union - South West Region Equality & Diversity Newsletter

January 2010 Edition 9

CWU LGBT Conference 2009

The CWU'S Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Conference 2009 took place in Bristol on the 21st November. Billy Hayes spoke to conference about the continuing need for equality, that it is part of what we do as a union and that to regard it as unimportant and not a 'bread and butter' issue was wrong. Linda Roy talked about the continuing attacks on LGBT people and the ongoing work of the committee.

Motions debated included, the Conservative Party's links with right-wing homophobic political parties in Europe, developing procedures to assess employers diversity practices, information to branches on transgender issues, supporting LGBT History Month and also support to Pride events in the UK and the murders of LGBT people in Iraq.

The two motions voted on to go to General Conference 2010 were a composite motion from Essex Amal and Central London branches to oppose the amendment to the Bill on hate crimes that allows the excuse of free speech to defend homophobic comments; and a motion from Solent Branch calling for an end to the enforced 'gay' exorcisms being performed by some evangelical Christian churches.

The first guest speaker was Michelle Bridgman, Project Manager for the Gender Trust and a part time stand-up comic. She gave a presentation that was both informative and humorous. She would make a very good speaker for any branch or region wishing to discuss transgender issues. The second speaker was Elly Barnes from the National Union of Teachers and LGBT History

Month Activist, who explained how she helps schools to inform and educate children about LGBT issues as well as tackling homophobic abuse. She went on to explain about *A Day In Hand*. This includes same sex hand holding day where people are encouraged to publicly hold hands, to show more LGBT people living their lives publicly without shame and to help people to accept the reality of LGBT lives not so unlike their own.

Top: Garry Jacobs, Devon & Somerset;

Middle: Lynn Hart South West & Thames Valley

Below: South West Equality & Diversity Committee: (l to r) Gary Williams, Solent; Pascal Mensah, South West Engineering; Sandy Best South West No. 7; Lincoln Dookie, Bristol & District Amal; Katy Hartland, Gloucestershire Amal; Lynn Hart, South West & Thames Valley; Patrick Moorshead, Guernsey; Garry Jacobs, Devon & Somerset.



Equality Officers Profile

Hi - my name is Sandy Best and I am the equality officer for south west no 7 branch. Our branch covers all of the SN postcode area. This includes the mail centre (combining Swindon, Reading and Oxford), walk bundling & network drivers at the Wheatstone road site next door to us and all the ten delivery offices & one SPDO. We are the only branch in the south west to have grown in numbers in 2009. This is due to incorporating mail centres from OX & RG and recruiting new members of staff for the extended mail centre. We now have around 1700 members.

I took up my position in 2006. There is never a dull day in this role. I look on my job as complementing the industrial reps. if they have an equality issue – I try to advise them on it. I don't always know the answer so the Equality department at CWU HQ help me by providing fact sheets and an 'Equality officers toolkit' for me to use. If I'm still stuck I can always ring or email them and they try hard to help. The same goes for members when they have issues they want answers for. Some of the stuff I get asked isn't always equality related so if I can't help I point them in the right direction or find someone who can.

Another role that I perform for my branch is recruitment officer. I go into the inductions every week to talk to new posties about the union. This gives me a great opportunity to introduce myself as equality officer. I talk to them about bullying & harassment and how to deal /report it. (Including the union side of things!)

I am also a union learning rep. I set up our learning centre last May but have now passed the lead role to our women's officer. Sometimes you have to realise you can't do everything or there is someone who can do the job better than you.

Last year I was lucky enough to be asked by branch to visit all of our delivery offices to try to recruit new members. Again this gave me the opportunity to take equality posters/ literature with me and speak to members about their worries & concerns. I also organise a once a year one day mandatory Equality & Diversity training course for our new reps. The CWU asks

branches to complete this training for them within six months of taking up their positions.

I think that Equality issues are really going to start being attacked this year (especially if we have a change of government). Some of the rights that we take for granted have been fought for by our trade union predecessors over the last one hundred years. Voting rights, Anti-discrimination laws, Family friendly & caring rights and paid holidays are just some of the things we all forget we haven't always had!

As a union our number one priority is to all try to recruit new members. This is something every member can do because as a union we won't survive unless we do. At present we are losing about 1,000 members a month. This is through redundancies, retirements or not wanting to go on strike! That is why your membership contributions have just gone up! The more people in the union – the stronger we become – the bigger 'the voice' we have.

If the union has less money then Equality becomes a target for those who say it is just an 'add on'. The Equality department runs four excellent conferences every year (black workers, disabilities & special needs, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender and women's). There are also four committees run regionally every quarter (Equality, retired members, women and youth). If we lose all this we will be stepping back in history not stepping forward like we should be. Equality is as important to our union as Industrial relations and health & safety. Please support your union so we can support you!

Sandy Best, South West No 7, speaking at the CWU LGBT conference



Equality & Diversity Committee AGM

The Committee held their AGM in the Regional office, Bristol on the 19th January 2010 and branches represented were Hereford & Worcester; Solent; Gloucester & North Wilts; Gloucester Amal; South West No.7; Wessex South Central; South West Engineering; Devon & Somerset; South West & Thames Valley and the Regional Secretary

Trevor Matty (Hereford & Worcester) was elected Chair and Gary Williams (Solent) was elected Secretary, both unopposed.

Aims and Objectives 2010: Following debate it was agreed that we work on material for the upcoming general election explaining the dangers of voting BNP and the threat to equality legislation and rights under the Tories. The committee also considered working closely with the Youth Committee on this. We also agreed to look at material and attendance at regional Pride and equality events and Tolpuddle.

Guest Speakers: It was agreed to invite Linda Roy National Equality Officer to the next meeting, and for future meetings to invite Simon Sapper National Officer dealing with disciplines; Trish Lavelle Head of Education & Training to discuss equality training. Other suggestions were Sue Archibald Disability rights campaigner.

Regional & Branch Reports were received and issues included, new reps requiring the one day equality training, dealing with family friendly issues, concern over different languages in the workplace that can lead some people to feeling excluded, attendance at equality conferences, disability champions trained but no follow up support, BT Openreach new attendance patterns affect on work life balance, concern over numbers of stress cases recently, issues raised with Ramadan and school holidays coinciding this year and impact on ability to take leave, there is also the impact of people fasting and having to come to work, and a problem with ATOS support (Postal Sector) for people on return to work, complaints of lack of support.

Dates and Venues of Future Meetings: The next meeting will be on March 16th in the regional office, Guest Speaker - Linda Roy invited.

Visitors Report from LGBT Conference

As the wife of a CWU Equalities Officer I have always taken a keen interest in Garry's role within the Union and, like many other partners, have accompanied him to a few conferences. The LGBT conference held in Bristol on November -- 2009 was the last one I attended. This time I decided to see exactly what went on in the conference room and so, having procured a visitors pass, I sat in on the afternoon's proceedings.

I am so glad I did this as it was a real eye opener! Never have I been in a room with so many like minded people. I had thought that there would be some lively debating but - not so. Being like minded, everyone seemed to be in agreement and if there was any dissent then it was more constructive than negative.

I was shocked to hear from one speaker, Ellie Barnes, that so much prejudice still pervades our society in the 21st century. She spoke to us regarding LGBT History Month and how she has tried to raise the profile of this event. She has encountered prejudice along the way but steadfastly refuses to allow this to detract her from her message that prejudice does not belong in a modern society.

At the end of her talk she asked us all to stand up and hold the hand of someone the same sex as ourselves - a natural enough thing to do in my mind but apparently still not the 'done thing' to others.

I would encourage any partner of a union officer to take an interest and attend a conference or two and see the democratic process in motion and also have the opportunity to meet so many people that they may not normally meet in their day-to-day life.

I am hopeful for the future knowing that so many people from one union are trying so hard to make a difference and change attitudes which are outdated and misguided. I am so glad I decided to be supportive of Garry's union duties as this has given me the opportunity to meet and talk to so many wonderful people, all of whom are 'trying to make a difference'.

Niki Jacobs