ORGANISING, DEMOCRACY AND POLITICS

Employment Rights Act

The access to workers provisions are a massive opportunity for the trade union movement to rebuild itself. Branches are passing motions calling for adequate resources to be put into this effort, and Unite's Executive Council received a briefing on the provisions at its recent meeting. We need a comprehensive plan of action, which gives training and a role to our activists: the scale of the job means it can't be done by officers and organisers alone.

Employers are undermining genuine organising efforts by signing 'sweetheart' deals with pliant unions. Prospect at Meta (Facebook) and USDAW at John Lewis/Waitrose are just two examples, the latter 'recognition' deal excluding negotiations over pay, hours and holidays! Wherever we are organising and have membership we need to notify the TUC so that at least we can use Principle 3 of its Disputes, Principles and Procedures to object to other affiliated unions squeezing us out.

Rules conference

At 2027's Rules Conference the main subject for debate will be disaffiliation from the Labour Party. We agree with disaffiliation but calls for it are coming from the right as well as the left. Claims to be 'non-political' inevitably end in perpetuating the status quo or going along with the loudest voices. We should replace Labour affiliation with a framework in which Unite can can support candidates from those who sign up to support a democratically-agreed list of principles and policies to which we can hold them accountable. Local hustings should decide which candidates to back from this list.

In the GS election candidates needed to receive 119 or more branch and workplace nominations to be on the ballot, making it almost impossible for lay members to stand while senior Unite employees or those with support from a section of the union's paid apparatus have access to data and resources to reach so many branches. Supporters of lay member democracy need to work to roll back this rule.

Palestine solidarity

Work by activists pushed the EC the 2025 Policy Conference to publish a good statement on Palestine. It commits the union to supporting those who want to build campaigns of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS). So far, only the Scottish region has pursued this, with a meeting of 40 workplace reps held at the end of August. Activists should use this example to ask every region and nation for facilities to organise similar events and groups. A significant number of members want to take action over the genocide, and we have the remit to organise them in order that they can develop their own strategies for BDS.

Defending trans rights

Policy Conference reaffirmed Unite's position in defence of trans rights. This was agreed in the wake of draft EHRC guidance which would exclude trans people from facilities and services on the basis of sex assigned at birth. This has now been introduced as a statutory Code of Practice (CoP), constituting an unprecedented rollback of trans rights.

Unite has been muted on this issue, despite other unions publicly campaigning against the CoP and for a change to the law. A joint statement was released by the Women's and LGBT+ committee but not promoted widely, and follow-up action from a survey of members hasn't materialised. Caution may be due to concern about potential legal claims. However Unite rightly did not shy away from legal risks when throwing its weight behind the Birmingham bin strikes. This is a deeper issue of ducking political and social issues, weakening solidarity across the working class to fight for justice and freedom for all.

The LGBT+ conference last month was dissolved because delegates voted to not accept the positions of Standing Orders, which ruled six motions out of order on spurious grounds. At least one motion on trans rights to a sector conference also seems to have disappeared from the agenda without transparent communication to the RISC which submitted it.

The segregationist CoP is not only an affront to the dignity of trans workers and communities but is unworkable, forcing workers to police access to services and sowing division. Unite must take a moral and political stand against trans oppression, standing by any member who refuses to enforce exclusions to services and campaigning for a change in the law.