

May Day Greetings to all our readers



Making workplace safe

Hundreds of trade union health and safety reps took part in **TUC**-organised action inspecting their workplace buildings last week in the run-up to **Workers' Memorial Day**.

More than 600 reps checked for life-threatening problems like Reinforced Autoclave Aerated Concrete (Raac), asbestos and fire hazards ahead of 28 April, when we remembered those who have lost their lives due to work-related illness or injury.

More than 100 schools in England were shut down last year after the discovery of Raac, a material used mainly in public buildings between the 1950s and '90s, which has a lifespan of just 30 years.

Many buildings that contain Raac, including lots of schools and hospitals, are now at risk of collapse. Airedale hospital in Keighley, built in the late 1960s is just one of them: <https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/23577307.raac-concrete-affects-staff-airedale-hospital-keighley/>

Asbestos was also widely used in buildings until 2000 and more than 5,000 people die in Britain each year from diseases linked to the material.

And the cladding associated with the Grenfell Tower fire is still present in some office blocks, schools and hospitals.

TUC general secretary Paul Nowak said: “Everyone should be safe at work. But when some people step through the door of their workplace, they step into danger. We are calling on government ministers to speed up the removal of Raac and asbestos from schools, hospitals and other public buildings.

“If you’re worried about safety at work, get together with colleagues to join a union. Unions give workers the power to protect themselves. And the health and safety reps that we train can be life-savers.”

The union body is also calling for the publication of a national risk register, with public transparency about where hazardous building materials are located.

(Source: Morning Star 24 April 2024 with additional material)

Transport

Railways

Aslef has announced that drivers are to hold more strikes in their long-running dispute over pay. Sixteen passenger operators will be hit by one-day strikes, coupled with a six-day ban on overtime.

The drivers have not had a pay increase for five years and first balloted for strike action in June 2022. **Aslef general secretary Mick Whelan** said: “Since then train drivers have voted, again and again, to take action to get a pay rise. It is now a year since we sat in a room with the train companies – and a year since we rejected the risible offer they made which they admitted, privately, was designed to be rejected.”

Strikes will take place on **Tuesday 7 May** and **Thursday 9 May**. An overtime ban runs from **6-11 May**. The drivers have held 14 days of strike action since the dispute began in June 2022.

The government will use taxpayers’ money to compensate operators for lost profits.

Meanwhile the **RMT** union has rejected a below-inflation 2024 pay offer from Network Rail of just 3.5%. The offer came even though the benchmark measure of inflation used for negotiations is the November RPI figure which was 5.3 per cent.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that such double standards were unacceptable and an insult to hardworking Network Rail staff.

“Network Rail is once again making an offer that represents a cut in living standards as pay is not keeping up with the rising costs of rent, mortgages, energy, food, and other essentials.

“As a result, **RMT** is calling for urgent fresh negotiations and a much-improved offer for this year,” he said.

More at: <https://www.rmt.org.uk/home/>

Seafarers

The Guardian reports that P&O Ferries’ seafarers have been told they will benefit from new French legislation that could double their pay, in what appears to be a significant U-turn by the controversial ferry operator

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/apr/22/p-and-o-ferries-new-french-pay-rules> .

The move comes more than two years after P&O enraged the UK and French governments by [sacking 786 workers](#) and then taking advantage of a legal loophole to hire replacements on pay rates of below the minimum wage.

The UK and France responded by announcing new legislation, with France implementing regulations requiring ferry operators to pay their crew at least £9.95 an hour and limiting seafarers’ time on board ships to two weeks. The French rules will come into effect after a three-month implementation period (from March), while a similar UK law – requiring ferry operators to pay the UK minimum wage of £11.44 an hour – is expected to come into force this summer.

In March the Guardian and ITV reported that P&O agency cross-Channel workers were in some cases receiving about £4.87 per hour even lower than the £5.15 an hour the company had suggested was its lowest rate. Meanwhile, P&O crew members said they worked 12-hour shifts, seven days a week, for up to 17 weeks at a time. The workers said they had to remain on the ship until their contract ended.

The Guardian article explains that “the low rates being paid to P&O workers were achieved lawfully, with the company taking advantage of loopholes that exempted paying the minimum wage to maritime workers employed by an overseas agency and working on foreign-registered ships in international waters.”

HS2 - Unite wins two-year campaign to allow officials access to site cabins

The agreement secures the right of **Unite** officials to visit the project's inductions and rest facilities to talk to all the workers on the site during their breaks, in order to deal with any concerns or worries they may have. The access deal was signed after a two-year campaign by **Unite**, which included regular demonstrations, leafletting workers and resolving their concerns.

It leaves London tunnels consortium Skanska, Costain, Strabag as the last remaining main works contractors denying unions access to their sites with all other joint venture companies (JVs) – BBVS, Align, EKFB and Mace/Dragados – now holding agreements.

Unite regional officer Declan Murphy said: "Agreeing trade union site access should be a matter of course for all construction contractors. But the successful campaign to achieve the agreement with BBVS shows that Unite will overcome any obstacle put in its way to ensure workers are not denied union access. Unite will now be turning its complete attention to securing a site access agreement for SCS workers."

More at: <https://www.constructionenquirer.com/2024/04/24/unions-win-hs2-access-battle-at-old-oak-common-site/>

Local Government

School workers at **Birmingham City Council** have voted in favour of supporting strike action, the **GMB Union** has announced. The outcome comes as the Council has been criticised for delaying the settlement of equal pay claims made by low paid women workers. Workers at thirty-five city schools have voted to back the action, with 96 per cent supporting industrial action. Strike dates will be announced.

Alice Reynolds, GMB Organiser said: "Almost a year since Council bosses admitted an equal pay bill as high as £760 million, not one single women worker has received the money they're owed. Birmingham City Council owe GMB members money after years of stolen wages, the equal pay crisis only ends when our members claims are settled. This is no longer about sending messages; workers are now taking matters into their own hands. Birmingham's schools cannot run without our members and this strike action will have a huge impact.

"Council bosses are fast running out of time to fix this."

A spokesperson for the council which has declared effective bankruptcy said that the council would encourage the GMB to explore solutions by working together.

More at: <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/birmingham-braced-for-school-strikes-as-workers-back-walkouts>

Fire Service

Firefighters and fire control staff have been offered a package of pay improvements, including an above-inflation pay rise, improvements to maternity pay, and a large increase to the retainer paid to on-call firefighters.

Pay negotiations have been underway at the National Joint Council (NJC) between the **Fire Brigades Union (FBU)** and fire employers for some months. The offer, which would be binding on all fire and rescue services across the UK, includes:

- A headline pay increase of 4% which is above the current rate of CPI inflation, currently at 3.2%.
- A minimum maternity pay entitlement of 26 weeks on full pay. This more than doubles the baseline for maternity pay.
- A 50% increase in the retainer paid to firefighters on the Retained Duty System (RDS) – from a maximum of 10% of basic pay to 15%. This is the first such rise in decades.

The offer is being put to a ballot of **FBU** members between 3 May and 17 May. If approved, the headline pay increase will take effect from July 2024, with changes to the retaining fee taking effect in January 2025. The **FBU** executive council has unanimously recommended that its members accept the offer.

More at: <https://www.fbu.org.uk/news/2024/04/26/firefighters-win-4-pay-offer-and-advances-maternity-following-talks>

Job Centre security guards to strike

More than 1,000 job centre security guards are set to walk out in a dispute over pay. Staff employed by G4S to work at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will walk out across the country as follows:

7 May at 00:00 until 8 May at 23.59; 13 May from 00:00 until 23.59; 20 May from 00:00 until 23.59; 28 May at 00:00 until 29 May at 23.59.

The dispute is over a G4S below-inflation pay offer, meaning nearly 70 per cent of the security guards, are now only paid the minimum wage.

More at: <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/more-than-1,000-job-centre-security-guards-to-strike>

Education - strike mandate renewed

Staff at five colleges in Cleveland, Redcar and Stockton-on-Tees have again voted to strike, renewing their mandate to take action. An overwhelming 94% of **UCU**

members who voted said yes to strike action in a ballot that with a turnout that beat the anti-trade union threshold of 50%.

The strike vote is the latest escalation in the long running dispute over the 22/23 pay award. It comes after staff took six days of strike action and rejected employer Education Training Collective's (ETC) latest offer. This did not include any improvement on pay and was limited to an extra two "wellbeing days" and additional points on the lecturer and course leader pay scales starting on Thursday 1 August 2024. ETC's position on pay remains that it wants staff to accept a paltry increase of just 3% for 22/23, with an additional 1% from May 2023.

More at: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/13544/Staff-at-North-East-college-group-renew-strike-mandate-with-yes-vote>

Action wins recognition vote at Amazon

The **GMB Union** has announced that the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC), the Government body responsible for regulating collective bargaining between workers and employers, has ruled in favour of **GMB's** application for a union recognition vote at the company's Coventry Warehouse.

After over a year of industrial action and thirty strike days, the CAC determined that, on the balance of probabilities, a majority of the workers would favour recognition of the Union. This paves the way for a legally binding vote of Amazon Coventry's workforce.

Union recognition would mean Amazon would be forced to sit down with **GMB** on matters relating to pay, hours, and holidays; the first time this has been achieved anywhere in the world outside of the USA.

Amazon bosses thwarted earlier attempts by workers to deliver union recognition by flooding the fulfilment centre with over a thousand new staff, in order to sidestep legal recognition thresholds. Despite this, union membership has continued to grow in the company's Coventry Warehouse.

The CAC will now appoint an independent organisation to arrange a legally binding vote of workers, with a ballot timetable likely to be announced in the coming weeks.

More at: <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/amazon-workers-will-decide>

Tata

A petition signed by 30,000 people calling on politicians to support UK steel will be handed into the Senedd in Cardiff on 23 April, as part of **Unite's** campaign to secure the sector's future. The petition, sending a clear message to Westminster

that Wales and the rest of the UK needs a strong steel industry, comes after Tata workers in Port Talbot and Llanwern voted to strike over the company's plans to shut down its blast furnaces and shed 2,800 jobs.

More at: <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2024/april/30-000-strong-support-uk-steel-petition-handed-to-welsh-government>

UNISON victory at the Supreme Court

UNISON reports that judges have told employers they'll no longer be able to discipline their staff for taking part in legal strike action following a UK Supreme Court ruling on 17 April.

The union, which took the case on behalf of care worker Fiona Mercer, says the government must now act quickly to change the law and ensure no other employees are treated unfairly.

The judgment follows a two-day hearing in December. **UNISON** took the case to the Supreme Court to overturn an earlier Court of Appeal decision. The union had argued this had left the UK in breach of international law and striking employees without proper protection. The Supreme Court judges were scathing of the government's failure to provide the minimum protection UK workers should have been granted says **UNISON**.

More at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/2024/04/supreme-court-judgment-stops-bad-bosses-from-punishing-striking-workers/>

Rail renationalisation

The Party's recently announced plans to renationalise the rail firms by taking over the train operating companies (TOCs) as their contracts come to an end is welcome. But will private companies still be able to squeeze cash for themselves out of this important public service?

Read more at: <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/truth-behind-labour%E2%80%99s-plans-%E2%80%98renationalise%E2%80%99-rail>

Media

"No room for complacency" about media freedom warns the NUJ

Union reacts to new report in run-up to World Press Freedom Day on 3 May

"There is no room for complacency" warns the **NUJ** as a report from the Civil Liberties Union for Europe says media freedom and pluralism, "stand perilously close to breaking point in many EU countries" and "must be almost fully resuscitated in some". More at: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/no-room-for-complacency-about-media-freedom-warns-the-nuj.html>

THE PAST WE INHERIT, A GREEN FUTURE WE BUILD

EDUCATE, AGITATE
ORGANISE

WITH BANNERS HELD HIGH

★ COMPERED BY
IAN CLAYTON

AUTHOR, BROADCASTER
AND STORYTELLER

JON TRICKETT
MP FOR
HEMSWORTH

JO GRADY
GENERAL SECRETARY
UCU

★ SPEAKERS: ★

(OPENING SPEAKER)
DENISE JEFFERY
LEADER OF WAKEFIELD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

MATTHIEU
BOLLE-REDDAT
GENERAL SECRETARY
CGT CHEMINOTS
VERSAILLES

CHRIS PEACE
ORGREAVE TRUTH AND
JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

CHRIS KITCHEN
GENERAL SECRETARY
NUM

HEATHER WOOD
WOMEN AGAINST
PIT CLOSURES

KAREN REAY
REGIONAL SECRETARY
(NEYH) UNITE

**WOOD STREET
WAKEFIELD**

10:45 am Assemble
Smyth St, WF1 1ED
for 11:30 March
to Wood Street, WF1 2HQ

REMEMBER THE MINERS STRIKE DEFEND THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

★ **MARCHING BANDS**

EMLEY BRASS BAND
PCS SAMBA BAND
CROFTON SILVER BAND

★ **SALLY CINNAMON**

SINGER SONGWRITER
FROM WAKEFIELD

★ **CHILDRENS ACTIVITIES**

ORGANISED BY GROW WAKEFIELD
IN THE TOWN HALL

★ **JOE SOLO** ★

SELF PENNED FOLK,
PUNK, BLUES &
ACTIVISM

★ **ATTILA THE
STOCKBROKER**

FOLK PUNK MUSICIAN
AND SONGWRITER

**CAMPAIGN STALLS,
FOOD, BAR**

EXHIBITIONS IN THE TOWN HALL:
DISPLAY OF HISTORIC BANNERS PLUS SLIDESHOW!
SLIDESHOW BY PAST PIXELS
**BACKBONE OF THE NATION: 40 YEARS ON FROM
THE MINERS' STRIKE**



**Trade Union banner blessing.
International Workers'
Memorial Day service.**

Monday
29 April
1.00pm

Some banners will remain on display
in the Cathedral until 10 May
Wakefield Cathedral, Northgate, WF1 1HG

TALKS AND WORKSHOPS

A Talk by Nick Jones, Journalist Wednesday 8 May 7.00pm

The Art of Class War:
the 1984-85 miners' strike as seen by news cartoonists
(Joint WBHH & Media North Event)

Talk is free entry but book seats via QR code/Linktree
@Wakefield Town Hall, Wood Street, WF1 2HQ

**Workshops:-
In person and streaming online!**

**Asbestos in the Workplace:
the Hidden Killer** Thursday 25 April 6.00pm

@NUM Headquarters, 2 Huddersfield Road, Barnsley, S70 2LS

Defend the Right to Protest Friday 10 May 5.00pm

with Orgreave campaign and other speakers
@Wakefield Town Hall, Wood Street, WF1 2HQ

**10th MAY
FRIDAY
EVENING
FRINGE**

TALK
FROM 7:30PM
**GRANVILLE
WILLIAMS**

**THE BEGINNING OF
WITH BANNERS**

8:15PM MUSIC BY
**UNCLE PAF &
FRED SHERIFF**
THE MINER AND HIS SON
40TH ANNIVERSARY TOUR



@ RED SHED
18 Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1 1GX

**11th MAY
SATURDAY
EVENING
AFTER PARTY!**

8:15PM MUSIC BY
**UNDERDRIVE
JOHNNY**
CLASSIC ROCK
AND POP
ACOUSTICALLY

**MINERS' STRIKE
40th
ANNIVERSARY**

YORKSHIRES BIGGEST TRADE UNION EVENT