

# **Trade Union News** Skipton & Ripon Labour Party

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## **Budget ‘a vital first step’ says TUC**

Commenting on Labour’s budget statement from the Chancellor Rachel Reeves, TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak said: “The Chancellor was dealt a terrible hand by the last Conservative government – a toxic legacy of economic chaos, falling living standards and broken public services.

“But with today’s budget the Chancellor has acted decisively to deliver an economy that works for working people.

“The government’s investment plans are a vital first step towards repairing and rebuilding Britain – securing the stronger growth, higher wages and decent public services that the country desperately needs.

“Tax rises will ensure much-needed funds for our NHS, schools and the rest of our crumbling public services, with those who have the broadest shoulders paying a fairer share. The Chancellor was right to prioritise hospitals and classrooms over private jets.

“There is still a lot more work to do to clean up 14 years of Tory mess and economic decline. – including better supporting and strengthening our social security system.

But this budget sets us on an urgently needed path towards national renewal.”

Source: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/labours-investment-budget-has-begun-process-repairing-and-rebuilding-britain>

More trade union comment at: <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/unions-welcome-rise-in-public-spending-but-say-rich-should-have-been-made-to-pay-fair-share>

## **NUM welcomes overturning of historic pensions’ injustice**

More than 100,000 former mineworkers will receive £1.5 billion kept from their pensions following the privatisation of British Coal in 1994. Chancellor Rachel Reeves announced during her budget presentation that the government will overturn a “historic injustice” by relinquishing any claim on the Mineworkers Pension Scheme (MPS) Investment Reserve Fund. This means a 32% increase to the annual pensions of 112,000 former mineworkers, an average increase of £29 per week for each member.

An investment reserve fund was set up using profits from the MPS in 1992. It was to provide a buffer in case it went into deficit and due to be returned to the government in 2029.

Industry Minister Sarah Jones said the fund, now valued at £1.5bn, will be handed over to the pension scheme instead as the monies had sat for years “unused at times when people needed it most.”

The National Mineworkers Union (NUM) general secretary Chris Kitchen welcomed the announcement. He added that he was “hopeful” there would be further positive news for ex-miners ahead of a meeting last night with Mr Miliband and Ms Jones to discuss the government’s upcoming review into the “unfair” surplus sharing arrangement.

The arrangement was made between the government and the trustees of the two British Coal pension schemes when it was privatised.

Under the deal, government gets half of any surplus cash from the pension schemes while guaranteeing that no pension falls in cash terms and increases annually in line with the retail prices index.

The NUM has long lobbied for a review of this arrangement, saying the actuarial advice used to justify it had been “too cautious” and that the government’s 50 per cent share is too high.

The Trustees of the Mineworkers’ Pension Scheme chair Gary Saunders said: “As a trustee board we are delighted we will be able to put more money in our members’ pockets.”

Also at: <https://num.org.uk/news/mps-investment-reserve-fund-announcement/>

### **Better protection at work**

As the new the Employment Rights Bill, published on 10 October makes its way through Parliament, a new law aimed at eradicating sexual harassment at work came into force on 26 October.

The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act introduced a legal duty on employers to “take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment”. It covers sexual harassment by third parties such as an employer’s customers, including shoppers harassing shop workers. If an employer fails to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment, then the Equality and Human Right Commission can take enforcement steps, plus any successful tribunal claim will be subject to a compensation increase of up to 25%.

TUC general secretary Paul Novak said the Act: “is an important step towards making workplaces safer for workers, particularly women, but more needs to be done.

“No-one should face sexual harassment at work, or in the wider society, but we know that women experience sexual harassment and abuse on an industrial scale.

“The new Act, which was hard-won by unions, will put the responsibility firmly on employers to take a pro-active approach to keeping workers safe from sexual harassment and to tackling it in their workplaces.”

### **Guardian & Observer journalists to ballot for industrial action over sale of The Observer**

**The National Union of Journalists (NUJ)** has informed the Guardian Media Group of its intention to ballot members following an overwhelming indicative vote in favour of industrial action.

93 per cent of journalists on a turnout of 70 per cent indicated their willingness to take strike action and 96 per cent voted in favour of action short of a strike. The resounding decision is in opposition to the proposed sale of the Observer and follows confirmation by the Guardian Media Group in September that it is engaged in exclusive talks with Tortoise Media.

No engagement with journalists or the **NUJ** was sought prior to negotiations by GMG and the union has voiced its deep-rooted concerns over the viability of the title and journalists’ jobs if it is sold to James Harding’s start-up. The company, not yet profitable, has pledged £20m capital investment with plans to implement a paywall if the bid is accepted.

More at: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/guardian-observer-journalists-to-ballot-for-industrial-action-over-sale-of-the-observer.html>

### **Use of anti-terror laws condemned**

The **NUJ** has condemned the rising use of counter-terrorism legislation against journalists as an intimidatory measure, harmful to public interest journalism and the right to report.

The **NUJ** recognises the raid of journalist Asa Winstanley’s home on Thursday 17 October 2024, part of so-called ‘Operation Incessantness’, as the latest in a string of targeted approaches by police officers using anti-terror legislation and contributing to a concerning police culture where the rights of journalists and their ability to ensure the safety of sources is placed at risk.

The seizure of journalistic material and devices, the detention of journalists, and the failure of constabularies to sufficiently outline reasons for the apparent pursuit

of journalists is condemned by the union, and has rightly raised alarm among members of the public for its undermining impact on journalism and media freedom.

More at: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/nuj-condemns-abuse-of-counter-terror-legislation-as-harmful-to-media-freedom.html>

### **Manchester mental health teams strike over inadequate staffing and funding**

On 16 October **UNISON** and **Unite** members working for the Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Trust Early Intervention in Psychosis service (EIS) took strike action for adequate funding for this vital service. They were not asking for better pay but were calling for more funding to ensure that their service can deliver adequate care to some of the most vulnerable people in society. Several service users joined them on the picket line to support their action. Meetings with management and with Andy Burnham, the Greater Manchester mayor, are planned, as are two more strike days on 8 and 11 November.



Lack of funding means staff are only able to deal with the most serious crises, and can do very little preventative care that would stop people reaching crisis point. They are dealing with caseloads of up to 40 patients when there should be no more than 15. Freezes on vacancies and over-reliance on temporary agency and

bank staff mean lack of consistency in care. Patients, many of whom require long-term support and continuity of care from specific clinicians, often just get fleeting visits from different staff, or no-one at all.

For some years, the EIS staffs were outsourced to Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber Mental Health NHS Trust, which separated them from Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) they should have been working with closely and fragmented the service. They were brought back in-house, but their continuing grievances about understaffing and lack of support were never dealt with properly. They were promised that a bid had gone into the commissioners for extra funding and was likely to be successful – but if it was ever granted it didn't find its way to the teams.

With the commissioners, Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board, trying to fill a £175 million funding hole, all NHS services in Greater Manchester are faced with cuts. There are demands for 'service improvements' (doing more with less) but a refusal to pay for the skilled staff needed to provide the service. Yet up to £30 million a year is spent on out of area beds for severely ill patients, because inpatient beds have been severely cut. That's money going straight into the pockets of private health providers rather than being invested in NHS services.

More at: <https://skwawkbox.org/2024/10/26/manchester-mental-health-teams-striking-over-inadequate-staffing-and-skewed-priorities/>

### **UCU - Months-long strike action at five colleges in Tees end**

Teaching and support staff at Teesside's Education Training Collective (ETC) have taken part in 13 days of industrial action over the past 17 months, according **UCU**. They have now been awarded an increase of up to 16.5%, compared with their pay three years ago.

The group runs Bede Sixth Form College and The Skills Academy in Billingham, Stockton Riverside College and NETA Training Group, and Redcar and Cleveland College.

**UCU** regional support officer Chris Robinson said the dispute's resolution was "an example of what is possible when members stand up, organise and fight".

### **UNITE - Action at Fords**

More than 1,000 employees at Ford struck for 24 hours in a dispute over pay and contract changes. Administrative staff working at the company's sites across the UK walked out on Wednesday, 30 October.

**Unite** has warned there will be more strikes if the dispute is not resolved.

But Ford said the total pay increase that has been offered is "fair and balanced".

The strike affected Ford's sites in Dunton in Essex, Stratford, Dagenham in east London, Daventry in Northamptonshire, and Halewood on Merseyside.

The union wants its members to receive a permanent pay raise. Instead, Ford has only offered a one-off payment for 2024. It also stated Ford was wrong for wanting to introduce 100% performance-related pay and to change sick pay policy.

### **NASUWT action called off in Northumberland**

Strike action at a series of schools has been called off after a compromise was reached. **NASUWT** members in Northumberland had been due to walk out on Thursday, 31 October but returned to work after a compromise was reached between the union and Northumberland County Council. Teachers had been striking over fears of potential job losses as the Berwick partnership of schools moves from a three-tier to a two-tier system.

The agreement will see three middle schools close, but with new rules for ring-fencing staff in the first round.

John Hall, **NASUWT** National Executive Member for Northumberland, said it was a good outcome but warned that further strike action could take place if there were more disagreements.

Ends