

Understanding the need for a responsive and progressive leadership of the new union

British trade unions have toiled for decades to promote the interests of working people and the less able in society; various federations have been established but none have been successful in taming capitalism.

Now Globalisation, the latest form of capitalism has emerged even more formidable.

This has led politically to an abandonment of social democracy and the acceptance of the prevailing neo-conservative belief that market forces are like forces of nature and cannot radically be interfered with and will always produce the best result. This political/economic concept is now embraced by the leaders of the overwhelming majority of workers parties in Western Europe.

Through hard and personal experience workers are realising that this is the road to disaster, to social inequality and a suffocating race to the bottom; eroding hard won terms and conditions of employment in an attempt to survive the global market and the off-shoring of our jobs.

Amicus Unity Gazette has consistently campaigned for the defence of quality jobs and the rejection of laws that make it easier for profit hungry employers to exploit foreign workers, living either in the UK or abroad.

A global economy means that these objectives are not realisable by campaigning solely in the UK. Global capital requires a global response from workers. That is why the development of transnational union formations is essential if we are to build an effective response to globalisation, which tackles inequalities in wages and

conditions and which enables us to prevent the exploitative strategy of the employers. This is a key objective in the formation of the new union.

The prevailing view amongst Amicus Unity Gazette supporters is that despite all the difficulties trade unions still represent the best option for principled social advance. We believe the formation of the new union and the creation of meaningful international links with other unions is the way forward to unite the global workforce in a common cause.

From the struggle to achieve meaningful international trade unionism will develop the new awareness that is necessary to recapture the workers parties to policies that reflect the interests of workers internationally. This must begin with the defence of workers jobs and the mass organisation of the unorganised workers in both the UK and abroad.

There are serious forces at work to prevent us achieving our goal but we remain optimistic that with the correct leadership and the participation of activists at all levels of the new union we can achieve our goals.

Amicus Unity Gazette is promoting candidates to stand for election to the Amicus section seats on the National Executive Council of the new union. Candidates who want to move the union forward and banish pessimism and defeatism from the labour movement.

Democratic Control

Most Gazette supporters remain concerned that the election of Full Time Officers will not be in the new rule book, particularly as increasing the size of the union may lead to national officials becoming increasingly remote. However we reached the over-riding view that it would be wrong to oppose the merger on this point alone as the envisaged benefits of the merger to the members carry greater weight.

The policy of the Gazette is to continue to campaign within the new union for the members to have the right to determine which Full Time Officials will work on their

behalf. We remain convinced that electing officials is the best method of achieving this end.

The Gazette believes that lay democracy is at the heart of any successful union. We believe that lay bodies at all levels of the union must have adequate resources and power to play an effective role. In particular, we believe that all full time officials must be responsible to the appropriate lay bodies in their areas of responsibility.

We look forward to discussing the whole issue of accountability within the new union with colleagues who are currently members of the TGWU section.

We need a union fit for purpose

Whilst we wholeheartedly welcome the formation of the new union and the further international cooperation it is important that we ensure that as the union grows in size, its structure and principal officials do not become distant and remote to the members, the workplace organisations and branches.

The ending of discrimination and the promotion of equal pay and equal opportunities should be at the heart of the new union.

The needs and the decisions of the members should drive the union rather than its structure and administrators.

The ability to be a responsive campaigning union on a region, sector or national basis that supports key lay activists and officials/staff with designated duties is of primary importance.

We must reverse the current 'service Industry approach' of unions and their officials working for the members rather than working with the members.

The development of a successful Shop Steward/Union Representatives organisation supported by effective training and education is essential.

From time to time lay members will have complaints about how they are treated by other members, lay officials, full time officials, committees and councils. We need an effective complaints and appeals procedure for members under which the final appeal is heard by lay members who are independent of the NEC.

Above all else the administration of the union at any level should always be accountable to the appropriate members or their elected representatives.

The Gazette believes that the union should remain focussed at all times on pursuing policies that meet the needs and aspirations of our members; regardless of which political party is in government at the time or the duration in office of its leader.

Anti Trade Union Law

Most of the current anti-trade union laws were introduced by the Conservatives between 1979 and 1995.

The Gazette believe that these laws must be repealed, or replaced with other laws - they repress working people and hinder our attempts to combine together to take just action against unfair employers. These laws are also illegal in themselves - they contravene the UK's international obligations under ILO Conventions, the Social Charter of the Council of Europe and United Nations declarations and covenants.

Labour laws now are worse than they were over 100 years ago. Changes in the world of work - with the fragmentation of organisations and the growth of non-standard work contracts - mean that the situation has continued to deteriorate for working people over the last quarter of a century. The proposed British opt out on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is a sign that we can expect nothing better, unless we act now.

(The charter is designed to enshrine and protect human and social rights and included a broad reference giving workers the right to strike. Tony Blair was opposed to this as he felt it threatened labour

market flexibility and would over-turn the more rigid laws governing unions.)

Amicus Unity Gazette candidates believe that positive legislation in the field of industrial relations is required - laws which will protect trade unions from legal attacks, allow them to operate democratically and protect their members; laws which restore and extend collective bargaining, give each worker the right to strike and be represented by a union, protect workers against exploitation and provide the basis for a fairer and more just society.

Employment Rights

Extending employment rights for members must be the number one political objective of Unite.

Amicus Unity Gazette candidates standing in the election for the NEC are insistent upon the following changes:

- The provision of full legal protection from the first day of employment.
- Allowing every worker to be represented by a trade union, both individually and collectively and on any issue.
- Support for workers in their demand for direct employment.
- The extension of paid time off for all parents to care for young children.
- Strengthening unfair dismissal legislation to enable reinstatement or re-engagement decisions by Employment Tribunals to be mandatory.
- Strengthening protection against the exploitation of indigenous and migrant workers employed on part-time, temporary and agency contracts.
- Ensuring workers are not discriminated against on the basis of their sex, colour, creed ethnic origin, age and or sexuality.
- Increased protection and compensation in the event of bankruptcy and or redundancy.
- That the negative aspects of the Posting of Workers and Services

Directives are not implemented in UK National Law.

- A substantial increase in the National Minimum Wage and the introduction of a single rate that includes everyone over the age of sixteen.
- The implementation of "Dignity at Work" legislation to end harassment and bullying.

Equalities

The union movement has made great strides forward in recent years in improving the position of women and black workers within the workplace, society and the democracy of our union itself. But we cannot afford to rest for a moment - more so since inequalities in the workplace and in our society remain so profound. The Gazette will place the fight for equality at the heart of everything we do as a union. Equality and diversity does not mean treating everybody the same. It does mean removing the barriers that exist to every member of Unite giving their best and progressing to their utmost ability, in the union and at work.

We believe that Unite should be in the front-line of the fight against racism, and for women's equality, in workplaces up and down the country.

We believe in increasing the number of women and black officers of our union. There is no scope for complacency when nearly half the U.K. workforce is female but only a quarter of our membership is, and when hundreds of thousands of workers from ethnic minorities of both sexes work in low paid jobs without union protection. The Gazette fights for an agenda, which includes:

- Closing the pay gap between men and women workers.
- Strengthening anti-discrimination legislation where necessary.
- Campaigning for justice for asylum seekers.
- Fighting harassment and bullying at work.
- Putting pressure on both government and employers to raise the standard and availability of childcare facilities.

- Defending the needs of gay, lesbian bisexual, and trans workers, and fighting against homophobia or any form of discrimination based on sexuality.
- Recognising the special requirements of disabled workers to ensure their full participation at work and in the life of the union.
- Equality at work, equality in society and equality within Unite.
- Protection of the Public Sector Pension Scheme.
- 50% Union representation on Trustee Boards of occupational pension funds.

Pensions

The Gazette recognises that UK pensioners have the worst state pension provision in Western Europe. Urgent action is required to ensure that our members can retire with dignity. Our position on pensions is:

- Opposition to increasing the age at which people qualify for state and occupational pensions. We support the principle of reducing the age at which people can retire.
- We believe that women should not be penalised in state pension provision because of the time spent raising families.
- We support the establishment of a carer's pension fund for legitimate carers financed from taxation.
- The establishment of a State Second Tier Pension that is not used by employers to undermine existing Occupational Schemes
- A significant increase in the basic state pension to align us with the Western European average.
- The immediate restoration of the link with average earnings increases.
- Removal of the Upper Earnings Level for National Insurance Contributions.
- Full protection of occupational pension funds and outstanding employer contributions against other creditors in the event of the bankruptcy of the employer.
- Extending TUPE regulations to occupational pensions.
- The restoration of Advanced Corporation Tax (ACT) relief for occupational pension funds.

Public Ownership of Energy

There is an energy crisis in the UK. The spiralling energy prices have been so high that this has been the 'tipping point' for many manufacturing companies and with their closure has been the consequent loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs. Particularly hardest hit are those workplaces that are high energy users and more plant closures and job losses are inevitable unless action is taken quickly.

Trade unionists rightly demand that Government take action to establish a 'level playing field' on energy prices but this is to miss the point. You cannot effectively control what you don't own. The privatisation of the nation's energy industries has been a tragedy for workers where over 100,000 have lost their jobs. Now the disaster of private ownership threatens millions either as consumers of energy or as workers whose jobs are directly affected by increased energy prices. Whatever makes up a 'balanced energy policy', gas, clean coal, renewable energy sources, solar, nuclear or hydro-electricity, they should all be in Public Ownership, co-ordinated in a national plan to deliver cheap and safe energy. Only then will it be possible to talk about a level playing field for prices and ensure a sustainable development that meets the social and environmental needs not only of this generation but also for future generations.

The Government should immediately embark on major investment in research and development of renewable energy sources. The Government should ensure that workers in the energy industry are provided the resources to retrain to allow redeployment into the renewable energy industry with quality jobs.

Our view on the wider community

Health

Amicus Unity Gazette is opposed to the privatisation of the NHS.

Much of the new money that has been invested into the service has been soaked up by the private sector who profit from providing services to the NHS.

The rapid expansion of the private sector and increased competition between different parts of the NHS is fragmenting the NHS and stopping health staff working together for the good of patients.

The illusion of choice that is being offered to patients for hospital care is difficult to understand and access by the most disadvantaged in our society.

Most members don't want to have to research to find the best provider to receive care for an acute condition. They simply want to have in place a system that ensures their local NHS hospital is as good a provider as any other hospital in the country and that they can receive treatment free at the point of delivery.

Education

We are in favour of a state education system that does not make unnecessary demands on children and young people through excessive testing and provides a stimulating and challenging environment for learning.

We oppose the creation of Academy schools and other mechanisms through which the private sector is given control of our children's education.

We believe that further and higher education should be accessible to all who meet the educational requirements. Students should receive appropriate financial support and not be expected to pay fees.

As supporters of the lifelong learning initiative we deplore the government's cuts in funding for Adult Education.

Housing

The Gazette supports the "Defend Council Housing" campaign to secure the fourth

option of direct investment to council housing.

Providing adequate affordable housing particularly for first time buyers and those choosing to rent has become a major social issue. The grab for low cost housing by private landlords has inflated the price of home ownership out of the hands of many working people. Currently 50% of accommodation offered by these private landlords stands empty because of the high and unaffordable rents they wish to charge.

Environment

"Climate change and environmental degradation are threats to us all that require fundamental change not minor tweaks to the existing policies. The Gazette believes that Unite should campaign for:

- An energy system that is fuel efficient and based wherever possible on renewable energy sources.
- Reclaiming social ownership and control over public transport so that social and environmental goals can be prioritised.
- Better environmental regulation of industry, housing, and planning so that polluting practices can be eradicated.
- Democratise and devolve power in both the political and industrial spheres so that communities have the power to protect their local environment.

International

The Gazette believes that Unite should be at the centre of the struggle for peace and disarmament. The world remains a dangerous place, and the labour movement in Britain and Ireland should be a voice of sanity for peace and against aggression, including the attacks on Iraq and Afghanistan, and preparations for an attack on Iran. We are opposed to the Government's plans to build a replacement for Trident. We believe that defence workers should be found suitable alternative work through diversification into socially useful alternative products including meeting our future energy needs.

Recognising that the Trident replacement can only be funded through either increased taxation or cuts in other areas of Government spending; we would welcome the union commissioning a report similar to the report commissioned by the Scottish Trades Union Congress and Scottish CND and published in March 2007. This report considered the economic and employment consequences for Scotland in the event of the cancellation of Trident. A summary of the report can be found on the Amicus Unity Gazette web site.

<http://www.amicusunitygazette.org.uk/submitteditems.htm>

We believe the union should support the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Stop the War Coalition.

Future

The Gazette believes that the problems facing working people, in their jobs and in society at large, will never be fully solved while market capitalism rules in the economic sphere. We believe that the means of production should be brought under public ownership. Control of society should be in the hands of the majority of people not the City billionaires. We believe that Unite, the largest union in Britain, can, and should, contribute to the movement for a transformed organisation of society. We are, and will remain, committed to a socialist future.