



The Big Meeting marks 100 years since the General Strike

The 140th Big Meeting on Saturday 11 July was marked with thousands of people on the streets of Durham with bands, banners and flags. This year's Gala theme was the motto of the Durham Miners' Association: "The past we inherit, the future we build." The slogan was emblazoned across the iconic balcony of the County Hotel on route to the Old Racecourse.

The weather had cooled down considerably with cloud cover and a light breeze. There was even a hint of light rain in the afternoon, but many would probably not have noticed! The event drew an estimated 200,000 people and marked the centenary of the 1926 General Strike.

Union leaders and other invited speakers addressed pay and working conditions, the perceived failings of Keir Starmer's government, and what people could expect from an Andy Burnham premiership.

Speakers included recently elected general secretary of **UNISON**, Andrea Egan. During her address at the Old Racecourse, she referred to the gathering as the "biggest

show of solidarity". She also paid tribute to past workers, stating: "Workers in mines and mills at the dawn of our movement faced down impossible odds. It's up to us to honour them — organising hard, getting strike-ready and building power to beat the enemies of our class."

Other speakers included Judith Kirton-Darling general secretary of the **IndustriALL global union federation**, which represents 7 million workers in 39 countries in the mining, energy and manufacturing sectors: Joanne Thomas, general secretary of the **Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers**, and Mike Jackson, Co-founder Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners (1984), an alliance of lesbians and gay men who supported the National Union of Mineworkers during the year-long strike.

Alan Mardghum and Stephen Guy from the Durham Miners Association urged people to step up their support for the Gala by joining the Friends of the Durham Miners' Gala (MARRA) who urgently need funds to make sure the proud tradition of the Gala continues. More at: https://friendsofdurhamminersgala.org/join_us/

Local Middlesborough and Thornaby East Labour MP and long time supporter of the Gala, Andy Mc Donald, challenged the Labour government, demanding an end to private profit gouging by utilities and calling for tangible improvements in living standards and public services. Calling for a total reset for communities, he argued: "With Labour in power, our communities have got to feel the benefit, in their pay packets, their bills and their public services....".

All in all it was a wonderful display of solidarity and hope for the future. But the future of the Gala itself is under pressure and will only continue if more funding is raised to support this unique event.

More detailed report at: <https://theleftlane.media/durhams-big-meeting-200000-set-to-march-for-solidarity-as-gala-marks-1926-centenary/>

Andy Burnham – what the unions think

Speaking shortly after Prime Minister took up office, **TUC** general secretary Paul Novak praised Mr. Burnham for signalling “an end to the broken economic status quo” and prioritising action on the cost of living. Britain needed “urgent action to bring down energy bills. Taxing bankers’ enormous profits to pay for it and delivering Labour’s workers’ rights agenda in full,” he added.

Andrea Egan, **UNISON**’s general secretary said that the prime minister’s “diagnosis of the UK’s problems is right, from privatisation to the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. But we need policies to match. For the government to deliver real change it must be prepared to tax the super rich and take key utilities into full public ownership.”

National Education Union (**NEU**) secretary David Kebede said: “Delivering hope will mean that good intentions on Send reforms are coupled with the investment that is so desperately needed to make them a success.”

While Maryam Eslamdoust, **TSSA** general secretary, said: “People up and down the country need a government that is prepared to invest in Britain’s future and that starts with properly funding our transport and infrastructure and creating the skilled secure jobs our economy needs.”

Earlier all 11 of Labour’s affiliated trade unions backed Andy Burnham for Labour leader. They were: **ASLEF, Community, CWU, FBU, GMB, MU, NUM, TSSA, UNISON, Unite** and **Usdaw**. All 12 socialist societies who nominate for leader also backed him, with more than half running surveys of their members before doing so. It means Mr. Burnham became leader of the party with the backing of a significant chunk of the Labour movement

Second strike at bus factory over pay

Some 400 workers at the Alexander Dennis factory About 400 workers at Eastfield near Scarborough are set to walk out for a second time, from 16 to 20 July over a pay dispute.

Workers previously rejected a 4% offer from the company,. Their union **Unite** say that the cost-of-living crisis had been compounded for them "by years of sub-par pay increases". **Unite** said wages in the last five years had increased by about 15%, below the rate of inflation which had been about 35%, going by the Retail Price Index (RPI).

The workers previously walked out from 25 June to 1 July.

Alison Hume, the Labour MP for Scarborough, said she recognises the concerns being raised by staff who rejected a 4% offer from the company after “the cost-of-living crisis was compounded by years of sub-par pay increases”.

<https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/politics/alexander-dennis-mp-speaks-out-as-hundreds-to-strike-at-major-north-yorkshire-bus-factory-8800688>

Unite regional officer Dan Stephens said: “Alexander Dennis is entirely responsible for the disruption at its Scarborough factory. It could put forward an acceptable offer but is choosing not to. That is the only way this dispute will end.”

LNER drivers being balloted for strike action

Aslef has announced that train drivers working on LNER services, which operates services along the East Coast main line, are being balloted on a campaign of industrial action. Their action follows nine months of intensive talks with management leading to a three-year productivity deal, when LNER informed **Aslef** it did not have the mandate to negotiate the proposed package.

General secretary Dave Calfe said: “The company’s failure to make a suitable offer is unacceptable and that’s why we are balloting our members for industrial action.”

Potential strikes could affect routes connecting London King’s Cross with Leeds, York, Durham, Newcastle, Berwick-upon-Tweed, and Edinburgh Waverley.

The Morning Star reports (20 July) a department for Transport spokesperson stating that: “We have LNER approval for a fair and affordable deal. We know how frustrating disruption can be for passengers and strongly encourage the union to continue engagement constructively with LNER to reach a solution.”

Teachers to be balloted for strike action over pay offer

The National Education Union’s (NEU) national executive has decided that a formal ballot of teacher and support staff members will open on 3 October and close on 15 December.

While union pressure resulted in **a significantly increased offer** – a 6.5% increase over two years, rather than the government’s original plan to spread it across three, and an additional £700 million in 2026/27 to pay for it – it does not come fully-funded.

Schools are being left to find 1.1% from existing budgets to fund pay rises for teachers and support staff – who have been offered 3.3%. It means collectively head teachers having to plug a £460 million shortfall in an education budget that’s been stripped to the bone by every successive government since 2010.

In a recent survey of **NEU** members, 97% of respondents said they rejected the government’s 1.7% funding for the teacher pay award.

Meanwhile it is understood that the **Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)** will survey its members this autumn “to ascertain the impact on school budgets” of the government’s teacher pay announcement. As part of that survey, **ASCL** will ask what action it should take next, including “the option of moving to an indicative ballot on industrial action”.

You can read Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the **NEU** comments on Andy Burnham becoming Prime Minister at: <https://neu.org.uk/latest/press-releases/andy-burnham-appointed-prime-minister-hope-fresh-start>

Government U-turns on plans to stop paying coastguard volunteers

The **GMB** reports that coastguards have scored a huge win in their campaign to stop their pay being cut. Maritime minister Keir Mather MP (Labour Selby and Kippax) announced in parliament on 16 July the Maritime and Coastguard Agency [MCA]’s plan to stop hourly remuneration for attending incidents and training exercises would be halted.

Coastguard Rescue Officers (CROs) carry out rescues and search for missing people around the UK's coast.

The move had followed a landmark case by **GMB** Union, which saw the Court of Appeal uphold a judgement classifying coastguards as workers. Now, following a sustained campaign by **GMB** Coastguards, the move has been stopped.

Nicola Savage, **GMB** National Officer, said: "This is a richly deserved win for **GMB's** coastguards, who took their campaign across the UK and into the corridors of power. It was a scandal that these brave, life-saving workers would have their pay cut. But Ministers have listened and done the right thing."

<https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/coatguards-win-following-gmb-campaign>

Unite offshore workers win big pay rise

Offshore workers on the Elgin Franklin and North Alwyn platforms operated by Neo Next + Energy E&P UK LTD have secured a bumper pay deal after the threat of strike action. Around 50 offshore workers employed by Neo Next have backed an enhanced pay deal after a series of strikes were set to take place from 22 July. The one-year offer will increase the pay package by over £4,000 due to increases in basic pay and offshore allowance. **Unite** members through the threat of strike action have improved the Neo Next pay offer by approximately 75 per cent. The workers involved in the pay deal include control room, production and senior operators alongside operations and production technicians.

The complex is situated in the Central Graben Area of the North Sea, approximately 200 km east of Aberdeen.

Unite industrial officer Stevie Davies, said: "**Unite's** members employed by Neo Next remained resolute throughout and refused to buckle. They were fully determined to get what they deserved. The enhanced pay offer only came after the strong strike mandate, and we are pleased this dispute has been positively resolved with the support of our membership."

Unite members ballot for general secretary underway

The **Unite** General Secretary election is a contested race between the incumbent, Sharon Graham, and the union's international director, Simon Dubbins. Balloting started on 14 July and runs to 11 August. The result is expected to be announced on 14 August.

The term of office is five years.

Unison warns of 'divisive offer'

Having taken four rounds of strike action, Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and Critical Care Unit (CCU) **UNISON** members employed by Northern Care Alliance (NCA) at Salford Royal, Royal Oldham and Fairfield, Bury, Hospitals narrowly voted to accept an offer from NCA to settle their dispute about overtime rates. The staff can now choose between overtime arrangements in line with Agenda for Change or to work bank shifts through NHS Professionals.

The union has written to the Trust to advise them that this dispute is now over, but has warned the Trust that the offer, which is not applicable to all staff, has left a divided workforce. They have made it clear that the Trust is entirely responsible for this situation, which the terms of their offer have created.

As that dispute ended, **UNISON** members working in theatres at the NCA hospitals started strike action over the same issue: the right to be paid overtime at the nationally agreed contract rates rather than being forced to do additional shifts via NHS Professionals, which pays lower rates. Since the end of June, the theatre staff have taken several days of strike action. There has been no offer from NCA to end the dispute.

Messages of support can be sent to Kevin Dolan k.dolan@unison.co.uk at UNISON North West Regional Office.

Fighting Fascism: Knaresborough's Home Front

A celebration in story and song of how the town pulled together and won through

● **Red Wall** returns to Feva Festival with its eclectic blend of the comic, the tragic and everything in between.

● **Monday 17th and Wednesday 19th August** at 7.30pm at COGS (The Centre on Gracious Street, Knaresborough) Doors open at 7:15pm.

● **Tickets £10** from <https://feva.info/events> and from Castlegate Books Unit 3, 13 Market Place, Knaresborough HG5 8AL.

10% of net sales donated to the Knaresborough Heritage Centre.

○ This edition of Trade Union News was published on 28 July.