RO Report 2023

20-22 for UNISON and our members has been yet another year of great strife and struggle having to contend with great increased costs to housing, energy, transport and food prices- whilst the UK Conservative government lurched onwards with its austerity programme - changing prime ministers and cabinet's three times- having creamed off profits and partied as we came out of pandemic which public service workers had pulled the Country through. This has left us in a continuing financial crisis yet their only answer is tax cuts for the wealthy and blame the poorest for their own woes- the change of leadership akin to swapping round deck chairs on the Titanic instead of averting the course to disaster. Liz Truss disastrous tenure lost the UK economy **£65 billion pounds** – in less time than it takes a lettuce to lose its shine  - institute of fiscal studies  estimate to give all public sectors a pay rise that keeps up with inflation would cost - **£18  billion**-so the money is there – just not the political will to distribute it fairly.

As usual- people have paid the price, many cutting back on essentials, not heating their homes, whilst evictions and people relying on food banks - our members in public services are in the very front line trying to hold it together- working in health services, social care, education, and of course many of you in local government.

I think you can say 2022 was the year the Government stopped mealy mouthed calling public service workers heroes - which you are - and instead refused to give pay rises to the very people they previously praised and instead attacked them if they and their unions stood up and took action.

Many unions, including UNISON have vigorously campaigned and balloted member for pay- and taken strike action- UNISON members are taking industrial action in Ambulance service, Higher Education, Environment agency and Care Quality Commission.

Last year in Local Government after we had negotiated with the employers, through the National Joint Council our members accepted a pay deal which for many on the lower pay scales did keep pace with inflation but for higher pay scales did not -  it should be noted that the councils who make the employer side up, had made the offer through using existing funding for councils, they had not and still haven’t been given any extra money by the government to cover the rising costs -  this is leading to recruitment and retention issues of staff in local government. We have pay talks continuing now and the union side which UNISON are the largest union  have put in a pay claim for whatever **RPI inflation is plus 2%,** and we are waiting to hear the employers response. Given that the government are not giving them anymore money there is every possibility that the NJC employers won't be able to meet our pay demand which may mean in the near future, UNISON starting consultation ballot proceedings members,  so members should prepare for this.

At Regional and branch level UNISON have been very busy collectively negotiating and supporting members in public services, be they local authority or providing a serviced who has been outsourced to private companies, keep the workplace as safe as possible- holding employers to task – particularly on making building safer over Covid and other transmittable diseases; challenging unsafe practises and putting pressure on ensuring employer keep workplaces safe. We also have supported members working at home as the employee has responsibility to ensure they have safe working environment there too. UNISON have campaigned and increased the number of Health and Safety reps – particularly encouraging more women to step up into the role – so please consider taking on this role if you haven’t already or are able to in your workplace.

UNISON also support members take grievances if they have experienced bad treatment at work; support and defend members if they end up in disciplinary process and also offer legal support – assessing and even taking employer to tribunal if they haven’t stopped bad treatment or resolved it locally.

UNISON prides ourselves on being you friend at work – we are one of only a few unions with our own welfare charity – There for you who give practical and emotional support to members as well as financial assistance. There for You also organise school uniform grants for low paid members and have helped thousands of members across the UK with their heating bills

UNISON stand up for equalities and fight discrimination in the workplace – we have active self- organised groups representing Women, Black members, Disabled members; LGBT+ members and also sections for Young members and retired members.

UNISON are proud to make **2023 year of the Black Worker**, we recognise as well as facing the same challenges as other workers- fair pay, conditions of service, promotional progression- all too often it is harder for our black members because of racism and discrimination – whether it is deliberate full- on racism or institutionalised sub-conscious bias. As with all equality issues -  racism is an issue for all of us to challenge and UNISON are promoting the campaign hoping to help more Black members feel supported to become active in the union and build our self -organised groups – we can all play a part building this.

Dick Traynor

Regional Organiser