

CWU REPORT ON THE 2011 TUC DISABILITY CONFERENCE

Introduction

The TUC Disability Conference took place from Wednesday 25th May to Thursday 26th May 2011 at Congress House, London WC1. The CWU was represented by Linda Roy (National Equality Officer); Brian Booth; Peter Flook; Linda Keitz; Tony Sneddon (Chair of DAC) and Jeffrey Till. Pauline Granstan from the Research Department was in attendance.

Tony Sneddon was re-elected to the TUC Disability Committee.

Conference was chaired by: Pauline McArdle, David Bryson, Sean McGovern and Sasha Callaghan.

Kay Carberry, Assistant General Secretary, TUC reminded Conference of the benefits achieved for disabled people under the previous government. These included but were not limited to: getting more disabled people back into work; improved welfare benefits; better protection under the Equality Act and better access to goods and services. Kay said these rights were being eroded under the coalition government..

Motions

Motion No. 1 (as amended) “Con-Dem cuts are hurting disabled people” was moved by UNITE seconded by PCS and supported by UNISON. Conference called on the TUC Disability Committee to: involve relevant disability organisations/disabled people in forwarding the aims of the March on 26th March; publish a report on the impact of the cuts on disabled people; and lobby MPs about the cuts. The motion was carried unanimously.

Motion No. 2 “Public sector cuts and disabled employees” was moved by the FDA and seconded by NASUWT. Conference called on the TUC and its affiliates to: highlight the adverse effect public sector cuts are likely to have on disabled people; press for effective equality impact assessments; and press employers to fulfil their legal obligation to carry out reasonable adjustments for disabled employees. The motion was carried unanimously.

Motion No. 3 “Effects of cuts on disabled staff groups” was moved by NAPO and seconded by POA. Conference called for continued support of disabled staff groups with a view to improving disability equality in the workplace. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 4 (as amended) “Benefit changes and disabled people” was moved by Community and seconded by PCS. Conference reaffirmed: its support for the welfare state which has a crucial role in assisting and enabling people to find

meaningful employment; and support all reasonable measures to further the creation of jobs for disabled people. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 5 “Cuts to Disability Living Allowance (DLA)” was moved by CSP and seconded by the GMB. Conference called for continued campaign against cuts to the DLA. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 6 “Disability rights fight back” was moved by the NUJ and seconded by TSSA. Conference called for co-ordinated trade union action to fight the coalition government budgetary cuts. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 7 (as amended) “Stop the unnecessary and abusive medicals” was moved by UNISON and seconded by Prospect. Conference called for: campaign and awareness raising of the drastic cuts to disabled services and the DLA which potentially discriminates against disabled people. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Emergency Motion No. 3 “Unlawful council cuts to disability service and LuDun Sheltered workplace” was moved by the GMB and seconded by UCU. Conference called on the TUC Disability Committee to: send a message of support to the LuDun employees fighting for decent employment and to explore the implications of the High Court ruling in halting the closure of sheltered workshops and refinance the opening of LuDun. Emergency Motion No. 3 was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 8 “Access to Art” was moved by Equity and seconded by UNISON. Conference condemned the cut to the arts as a result of the coalition’s austerity measures. Conference supported Equity’s campaign against the art cuts. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 9 “Equality Act 2010” was moved by Brian Booth of the CWU and seconded by USDAW. Conference reaffirmed its continued commitment to maximise disability related equality building. The motion was carried.

Emergency Motion 1 “Red tape challenge” was moved by UNITE and formally seconded. Conference called on the TUC to encourage members to participate in the Red Tape Challenge on the Equality Act and to write to the Prime Minister to express opposition and outrage to the attack on equality legislation. Emergency motion 1 was carried with CWU support.

Emergency Motion 2 “The coalition’s retreat on equality” was moved by UNISON and seconded by Community. Conference reaffirmed its commitment to: effective and enforceable specific public sector equality duties; a legal prohibition on multi-characteristic discrimination; laws against third party bullying and harassment in the workplace; and a socio-economic duty. Emergency motion 2 was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 10 “Access to justice” was moved by USDAW and seconded by the GMB. The amendment by TSSA was remitted. Conference welcomed improved protection under the Equality Act for disabled workers, in particular tribunals’ ability to make wider recommendations to employers where they have been found to have

discriminated. It was agreed the TUC should: use its legal and political channels to make this known; lobby the EHRC to establish accessible public records of discrimination decisions and recommendations; and to explore how best to assess the effectiveness of the new rights in delivering equality for disabled people. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 11 “Supported employment” was moved by the GMB and seconded by Community. Conference called for united action to stop the rundown and privatisation of Re-employ. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 12 “Equality and Human Rights Commission – threats to independence and ability to discharge its statutory duties”, was moved by PCS and seconded by UNISON. Conference agreed to: campaign against the cuts to the EHRC; consider the potential for legal challenges and opposition to the Public Bodies Bill. Brian Booth of the CWU spoke in support of the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Motion 13 “Bullying and harassment” was moved by Prospect and seconded by PCS. The amendment by TSSA was remitted. Conference called for adequate resources to deal with disability issues, particularly in relation to mental health in the workplace. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 14 (as amended) “Mental health at work” was moved by UCU and seconded by UNITE. The amendment by Prospect was not carried. Conference called on affiliates to support employees going through mental health issues. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 15 “Discrimination in admissions to schools” was moved by ATL and seconded by the NUT. Conference expressed concern that pupils are being refused admission to academies on the grounds of wheelchair use and calls for an explanation from the Government as to how they intend addressing the issue. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 16 (as amended) “Championing education” was moved NASUWT and seconded UCU. Conference called on the TUC Disability Committee to: campaign to promote the benefits of state education for all learners including adults and young people and to expose the impact on disabled people of the coalition government’s programme for education. Jeffrey Till spoke in support of the motion which was carried.

Motion No. 17 “Disability History Month” was moved by the NUT and seconded by ATL. Conference supports the aims of UK DHM in promoting the disability agenda. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Motion No. 18 (as amended) was moved by TSSA and seconded by UCU. Conference agreed to campaign against the cuts and to continue their support of disabled people in their fight to gain equal access with non-disabled people to all forms of transport. The motion was carried with CWU support.

Guest Speakers

Ann Begg, MP for Aberdeen South reminded conference of some of the positive benefits now enjoyed by disabled people: a blind person is no longer turned away because he/she is not wearing a badge or a wheelchair user is not denied access to certain public venues. The long road to equality for disabled persons is now part of the Equality Act she explained. And contrary to what some would say, it is not a burden on businesses because funds are available to make reasonable adjustments. The Minister reminded conference that trade unionists had the task of educating civil society that the drip, drip erosion of equality by the coalition government is counter-productive.

Stephen Brooks (NUJ), convenor of the Disability Hate Crime Network, and Sasha Cunningham presented slides on the scale of prejudice in its various guises over the past century. Full scale genocide, extermination, eugenics, Aryanism and slavery are all the result of discrimination and prejudice. The context within which discrimination takes place may be different, nevertheless both Stephen and Sarah encouraged delegates to examine what is really happening. Adolph Hitler, they reminded conference, was initially adored as a hero but later exterminated thousands of people including those with a disability.

John McArdle, Black Triangle anti-defamation campaign in defence of disabled peoples' rights gave a brief history of his organisation. Black Triangle started last year and is now in operation for 18 months.

Sean McGovern addressed Conference.

Motion selected to TUC Conference

Motion No. 14 "Mental health at work"

Vote of Thanks

There were:

- 27 registered unions
- 207 registered delegates
- 14 exhibitors
- 9 observers
- 1 media

After the usual customary formalities, conference finished on Thursday 26th May 2011.

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