

SECURING GOOD WORK

As the election campaigning gets under way, Unions21 is urging politicians to pay attention to a new publication on how to make work better. **Sue Ferns** explains

UNIONS21 IS building on the success of its Fair Work Commission with a new report drawing on ideas from across the trade union movement.

Creating the Good Work Economy is being launched at the Labour Party conference in September, and includes contributions on issues from low pay to training to health and wellbeing.

Since its launch in 2013 the commission has demonstrated that unions have plenty of good ideas for creating better work, grounded in practical experience and expertise – see *Fair Work Commission First Report* and *Whose Recovery?* at: www.unions21.org.uk/publications

Britain needs a high-profile national debate about a future world of work. Workplaces that are increasingly unequal, characterised by insecure employment and rising levels of workplace stress and mental ill-health are not the route to a high-quality, high-productivity economy.

We urgently need a compelling vision of what good work looks like and a programme to deliver it.

Unions provide the most effective route to fairer workplaces and must be at the heart of this debate.

Our new publication provides the opportunity to reinvigorate industrial and political thinking, giving our ideas the traction they deserve. The contributors were all asked to set out their key idea for securing a good work economy. The report is in three sections:

- The first explores proposals for a change in direction.
- The second addresses the need for action to secure justice at work.



Above: Sue Ferns chairs a fringe event at the Unions21 events space at last year's Labour Party Conference

Below: Unions21 conference at the People's History Museum



- The third sets out proposals to deliver good work in some key sectors.

Unions will continue to develop their thinking, through Unions21 and other channels. Meanwhile this publication is targeting political colleagues aspiring to form the next government.

There are two key reasons why politicians should listen: **First**, Britain needs more good jobs in high-performing workplaces to rebalance the economy.

Second, driving positive change at work is without doubt a vote-winning agenda.

We look forward to constructive dialogue.

■ Sue Ferns is Prospect's director of communications and research

MORE INFORMATION

- Articles have been distilled into a 140-character key idea to use on social media – see Twitter @Unions21.

- The launch is at the Unions21 reception at Labour Party Conference, 6–8pm **Monday 22 September** People's History Museum Manchester. Email dwhittle@atl.org.uk to RSVP.

Share your ideas for events, publications, research, news

Twitter
@Unions21

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INSIDE

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Today the majority of the Bank is owned by over 30 trades unions and we continue to provide banking related facilities to around 85% of TUC affiliated trades unions. Not only this, but as a specialist

bank for social organisations and through our lending into the social economy, we can work together to enable social change, social benefit, and improve the lives of workers and communities across the UK.

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To find out more, speak to one of our trade union relationship managers:



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Playing our part as an industrial union

ASLEF general secretary

Mick Whelan explains why the train drivers' and rail transport operators' union has joined the Unions21 steering committee

ASLEF HAS decided to become a supporter union of Unions21. I believe we have a unique perspective as an industrial union from which to contribute to the discussion on the future of trade unionism, and indeed, we have already begun to play a full part.

ASLEF was founded in 1880 out of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants because drivers felt they were not fully served by a multi-grade organisation.

It was a brave decision when trade unionism was in its infancy and one that established our tradition as a member-led organisation, based on the dedication of lay representatives, and the protection, education, industrial and political aspirations that have brought us where we are today.

In the past few weeks I have attended numerous branches celebrating significant milestones – York 130 years, Doncaster 125 years, Paddington 130 years – and it's humbling to think of the thousands of members and hundreds of branch secretaries and reps who have written a few pages in the living history of unity, support and



solidarity that makes this union what it is. Part of building on that legacy in the face of a constant barrage of anti-union and anti-worker legislation is working with other unions, learning from other experiences, for the benefit of all.

A strong trade union voice in the debates of our time is as important today as it was when ASLEF was founded.

I was therefore particularly pleased to be able to contribute earlier this year to the

Unions21 publication on unions and democracy. As I said in my contribution: "Trade unions know a thing or two about the world of work and industry. We believe we have the answers to many of the problems the politicians can't or won't address.

"Our members are the people who do the job; in ASLEF's case in the cab at the front of the train. This is one of the most important reasons why a trade union voice in politics matters."

VIEWPOINT

The economy will never recover without a living wage

Unions21 steering committee member **Christina**

Sosanya explains why the living wage is essential to a good work economy

A GOOD work economy should be a sustainable economy that generates work for all people who want or need it, and pays at least a living wage.

How can any government create such an economy? Simply by legislating for the living wage to be paid to all workers.

Here are some of the moral and practical arguments in favour:

- A living wage would help workers to meet their daily living expenses and encourage them to want to work.
 - There would be fewer people on the unemployment register.
 - It would boost the spending power of workers, in turn helping providers of goods and services to remain in business.
 - It would help workers to avoid accumulating debts and the impact on their health when they are unable to pay their way.
 - Workers and their families would not lead a life of dependency on benefits.
 - The government would need to spend less on unemployment payments and on sickness benefits.
 - To argue that paying the living wage will bankrupt businesses is simply scaremongering.
- The unions fought for and won the arguments in favour of a minimum wage. Now they need to stand up and be counted in fighting for and achieving the living wage for all workers.
- It is time for the government to wake up and stop peddling the false hope that the economy is moving in the right direction because more people are in employment.
- Until the living wage becomes the norm the economy cannot be said to be improving. There are too many drawbacks from the inevitable outcome of people not being paid enough to justify them going to work.



Physiotherapist at work – unions have a key role in helping members develop the organisations they work for

Unity wi

As **Lesley Mercer** steps down from her senior role at the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists, she reflects on key lessons learned

THERE ARE a million and one things to do when leaving a job after many years. But who can resist an invitation to pass on a few reflections? So here are a few thoughts on how we do business as unions.

Getting the basics right

Few people get involved in trade union work with the idea of developing their managerial skills! But if every pound of a member's subscription matters and trade unions are to be properly accountable to their membership, there is no getting round the fact: serious attention has to be paid to how staff and budgets are managed.

Closely linked with this, no union can afford not have the reliable systems in place to answer phone calls, reply to emails and follow up recruitment enquiries. And when members have an urgent problem at work and often are at their most vulnerable, they have to be confident that they can access speedy and expert advice.

While union successes can be hard to publicise sometimes, no news gets round quicker than when members feel let down by their own union.

Sorting out the basics of member support is not only patently right, but also gives unions the credibility to get involved in wider issues.

New forms of working

The scenario is familiar: fewer jobs in the public sector; fewer jobs that are full-time and secure; more work in the private and voluntary sectors; more part-time and casual work; more portfolio working; and more self-employment.

How to respond to the changing nature of work is probably the most taxing question facing the trade union movement; possibly even more challenging than operating in the face of hostile employers, governments and laws designed to undermine us.

The key question for me is: can we retain our core values, especially around collectivism, but rethink what we can offer and how we organise in new settings? Effective organising and delivering quality services are high on the agenda for every union and need to stay there.

It always be our strength



Focus on equality

Keeping a focus on equality can seem like a luxury when times are tough. But ditching this would not only throw away one of our core values and all the progress we have made as unions, but also impoverish us. The more representative we can make ourselves, the more democratic and effective we are in our work – and the more we can recruit new members.

It also provides greater legitimacy when talking to employers and governments. Any union short of inspiration for new strategies need look no further than the annual TUC equality audits – a rich source of ideas.

Influencing

Last year I carried out some targeted interviews on the nature of influencing, in preparation for a lecture I had been asked to give to 1,000-plus people. I talked to union and business leaders, senior politicians, civil servants, and high-profile third sector campaigners.

Top of the list in every conversation was the theme of showing respect and making the effort to understand where someone else is coming from. This is sometimes hard to keep sight of in bitter dispute situations, but a handy reminder, nonetheless.

One publication I have always kept by me, also by way of a reminder, is the Unions21 debate piece *The Future for Union Image* – www.unions21.org.uk/download/251

It is a tad controversial, perhaps, but still as relevant as when it came out four years ago.

Rooting and promoting union claims around the value they bring to an organisation and its service users or customers will, I feel, be increasingly important for us when we are trying to influence.

The evidence showing how quality employment practice goes hand in hand with quality services or products is well established now, and we should be using it for all it is worth.

A natural consequence of this is reaching out beyond our own memberships to establish links with service users and community groups. We should take credit as unions for the progress we have started to make here.

Staff engagement

In contrast to the trillions of words written and spoken about the subject, genuine examples of effective, enduring staff engagement are much harder to find, in my experience.

Alongside the TUC's work in promoting

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worker voice in corporate governance, unions as trusted partners can deliver staff engagement by encouraging and facilitating employees to contribute their expertise to developing the organisations they work for. It's a time-consuming task, which requires much patience, but needs to be promoted at every opportunity.

Unity is strength

As TUC president I tried to use every chance to stress that unity will always be the strength of the trade union movement.

Whatever our differences on policy or tactics, we will always be stronger when we speak and act with one voice – with one trade union centre, the TUC, to bring us together.

If I have one wish as a soon-retiring trade union leader, it is that we never lose sight of the fact that our movement of more than six million members is the largest democratic grouping and force for good in the UK. We have the chance to demonstrate this at the TUC demonstration, Britain Needs a Pay Rise, on October 18!

■ *Lesley Mercer sits on the Unions21 steering committee. She is a former TUC president and stepping down as director of employment relations and union services at the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy*

Matching members' career aims
Matching our members' career aims is one place to start. It is no coincidence that these days, unions with the highest membership levels tend to have a strong professional focus. This means championing the cause of good quality jobs; lobbying for career pathways for all members regardless of role or grade; and extending the union offer to include direct support for training and development to complement support from the employer. I feel that all these potentially position a trade union well for the 21st century.

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The changing face of e-unions

Simon Parry offers his thoughts on the online technologies that trade unions will be using over the next few years.

HERE ARE some of the tools unions are either starting to adopt or will be adopting in the next few years:

Responsive design

Responsive design is a technique for building websites where the template automatically adjusts to fit the device. With the rise of smartphones and tablets, it's becoming vital that union websites are easily viewed on smaller screens as well as the latest widescreens.

Many unions are already using this approach. Research I carried out last autumn showed that about 20% of TUC affiliated unions have switched to this approach (see my blog at infofo.com for a full list). I expect to see the overwhelming majority of union websites deploying responsive designs in the next few years.

Better apps

We have started to see unions dabble with apps in the last couple of years. The TUC, Unionlearn, Unison, Prospect and TSSA are among the pioneers in this field, but some apps haven't been targeted effectively, resulting in few downloads.

I expect to see better focused union apps that do only one thing, but do it well. Prospect nailed this with its apprenticeship app, resulting in over 13,000 downloads to date.

Thunderclap

This 'crowd-speaking' tool was used to good effect earlier this year by the CWU, and other unions are now exploring this service. It works a bit like Kickstarter, but rather than pledging money you sign up to allow a message to be broadcast to your social media followers.

If successful, the message is sent out to all of the followers of the people who signed up to the campaign. The result is thousands of tweets and posts simultaneously publicising a campaign across all social media.



Cloud-based services

Cloud-based services have been growing over the last few years, but expect this to accelerate.

The price of cloud-based website hosting is falling, and the reliability and scalability of this technology is far superior to having a single physical server. I expect to see more unions move from costly internal email systems to more reliable and cheaper cloud email solutions.

It could be only a matter of time before we see a cloud-based membership solution challenging the oligopoly of traditional union membership systems – seen by many as overpriced and cumbersome. This would be in much the same way cloud services like Salesforce and Zoho have changed the face of the CRM (Customer Relationship Management systems) market.

Semantic web and schema.org

The semantic web, a common framework that allows data to be shared and reused more easily, has been promised for years now, but looks to be maturing at last. The schema.org standard has now been set up, and we can expect to see union websites implementing this over the next few years.

This will result in search engines and applications being more easily able to identify and display data

such as union publications, office locations and even the annual cost of membership.



Prospect nailed the focused app with its apprenticeship offering

■ *Simon Parry is a website and online technology developer and consultant who works with unions. His blog contains resources such as the annual trade union website and social media league tables – www.infofo.com/blog*

Why electronic voting for unions is long overdue

It's time for government to let us enter the 21st century, says Nautilus International General Secretary **Mark Dickinson**

CRITICS OF the trade union movement are always quick to paint us as undemocratic organisations living in the past. But we all know the reality is very different and that unions have worked hard to embrace the exciting opportunities that new technology offers to generate new and improved ways of communicating with members and potential members.

However, there's one big barrier in the way of progress towards 21st century organisation – and that's the outdated ban on online voting for many union ballots.

It's more than a decade since the TUC declared 'e-day' – a lobbying exercise seeking to persuade the government to end the restrictions contained in the Employment Relations Act preventing the use of electronic voting for major ballots. The Act contains the powers to make the necessary regulations – so why no action?

Where unions have been able to use electronic voting – such as pay ballots, and relatively low-level elections – participation has been high. In contrast, in many statutory ballots unions have struggled to get turn-outs much higher than 20%.

This helps no one. It certainly doesn't help our cause – as it gives employers and politicians ammunition to falsely attack the legitimacy of our activities and to continue to paint us as dysfunctional.

It certainly doesn't help our members either. Our union – whose members are frequently far from home on ships sailing around the world – faces massive challenges organisationally in a diverse, fragmented and globalised industry. When we held elections for general secretary and the Council last year, members on ships thousands of miles from the UK couldn't get the ballot papers – never mind sign them and post them back from places like the Antarctic in time.

In the 21st century it is simply unacceptable that members can be excluded from the democratic processes for no good reason.

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Today, it just doesn't make sense that union members cannot be allowed to vote electronically in statutory ballots for industrial action and union elections.

Those experiences last year prompted us to take a motion to Congress calling for a new campaign on the issue. We're delighted to see



Mark Dickinson: Electronic voting ban does not help members

that the TUC has taken this up and has written to Business Secretary Vince Cable urging him to bring union voting methods into the 21st century by allowing union members to

use their work computers, home laptops, tablets or smartphones to vote in future strike ballots.

Ten years ago, the government review missed the opportunity of adding phone and online voting to the traditional methods used in union ballots. Today, that change is more overdue than ever.

Electronic voting is being used successfully in elections around the world – from Australia to Venezuela – and old objections about security, cyber-fraud and identity theft have been shown to be invalid.

There's no good reason to prevent unions from conducting statutory elections electronically. Ending this online obstacle will not only open up e-democracy for the union movement, it will increase engagement and also help to save money. Perhaps these are the very reasons governments have not allowed such methods!

■ The TUC has launched an online petition to allow members to vote for secure online balloting <http://bit.ly/1oQ1tIR>

Unions21

UNIONS21 – AUTUMN EVENTS

TUC Congress

MONDAY 8 SEPTEMBER, 12.45-14.00

A New Deal for Work: Older Workers

Hall 14, BT Convention Centre, Liverpool. Lunch provided

How can unions give hope to the generation of workers that is working longer? The event will explore the union role in ensuring the issues of an ageing workforce are addressed by governments and employers

SPEAKERS: Liz Kendall MP, shadow minister for care and older people; Nicola Lee, Royal College of Nursing; Professor Peter Totterdill, chief executive, UK Work Organisation Network; chair: Amy Leversidge, Royal College of Midwives

TUESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER, 12.45-14.00

A New Deal for Work: Young Workers

Hall 14, BT Convention Centre, Liverpool. Lunch provided

How can unions give hope to the next generation of workers? The labour market is changing, placing unique pressures on students and young people. Many young workers struggle to find high quality

employment and often lack good careers advice and support. These themes have been explored by Unions21 Fair Work Commission and in a new NUS report on *The Future of Work*. This fringe meeting will discuss these challenges and the union role in finding solutions

SPEAKERS: Paul Nowak, TUC assistant general secretary; Toni Pearce, NUS president; Fabrice Muamba, Professional Footballers' Association; Nick Cusack, Professional Footballers' Association

Labour Party Conference

MONDAY 22 SEPTEMBER, 12.30-14.00

The union role in making Britain's creative industries successful and fair

People's History Museum, Left Bank, Spinningfields, M3 3ER; Coal Store conference room (Unions21 events space). Lunch provided

SPEAKERS: Helen Goodman MP, shadow minister for culture, media and sport; Gerry Morrissey, BECTU general secretary; John Smith, Musicians' Union general secretary

MONDAY 22 SEPTEMBER, 15.00-16.30

Valuing Young Workers

People's History Museum, Left Bank, Spinningfields, M3 3ER; Coal Store conference room (Unions21 events space)

SPEAKERS include Toni Pearce, NUS president and others

MONDAY 22 SEPTEMBER, 18.00-20.00

UNIONS21 RECEPTION

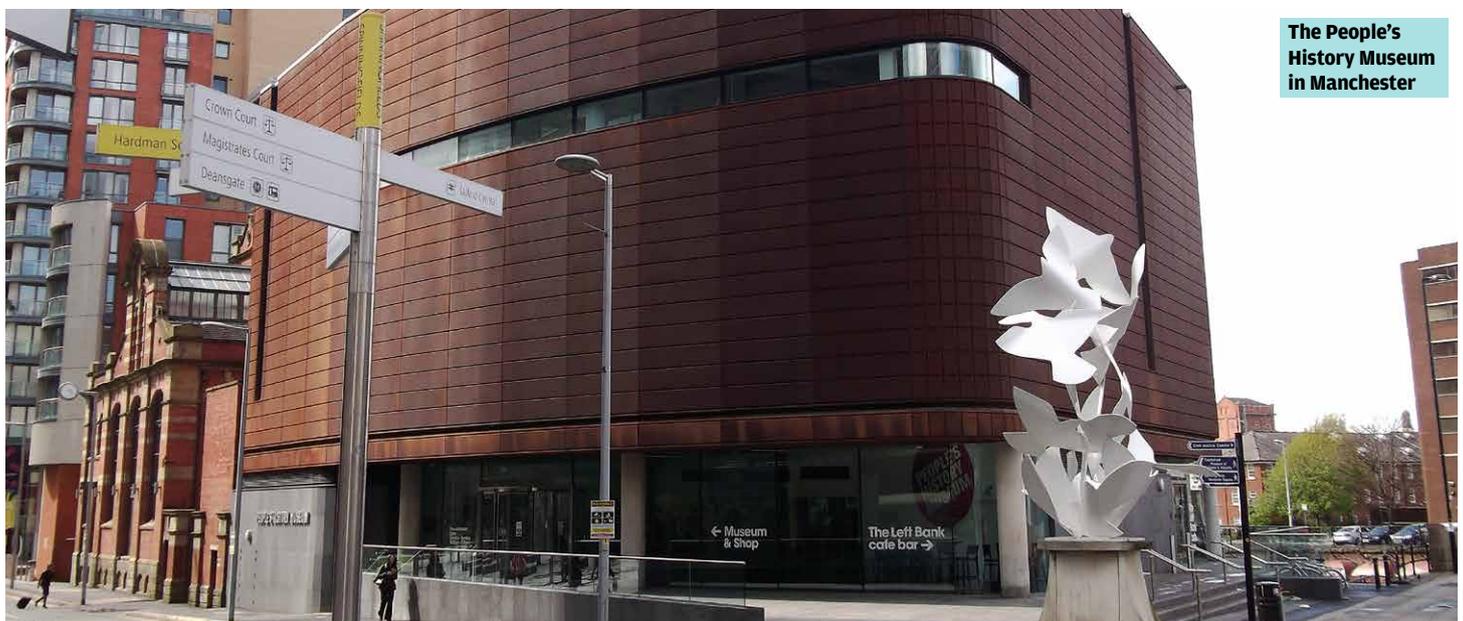
Creating the Good Work Economy

People's History Museum, Left Bank, Spinningfields, Manchester M3 3ER. Refreshments provided

Unions21 is building on the success of its Fair Work Commission with the launch of a publication drawing ideas from across the union movement

SPEAKERS include: Ian Murray MP, shadow business minister for trade and investment; Mary Bousted, ATL general secretary; Mick Whelan, ASLEF general secretary; John Hannett, Usdaw general secretary; Mike Clancy, Prospect general secretary; John Smith, Musicians' Union general secretary; Roy Rikhuss, Community the Union general secretary.

■ To RSVP to any of the events listed, please contact Dan Whittle dwhittle@atl.org.uk



The People's History Museum in Manchester