



The journal of the
Unity Trades Union

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Accidents will happen

Tim Cogan, (right) who handles personal injury claims at Tinsdills, the union's solicitors, spoke at Conference about some recent successes

Mr Cogan told delegates that the union still has a large take-up of personal injury claims because, unfortunately, accidents at work continue to happen.

"In the last two years we have recovered £725,000 in compensa-



tion for injuries and loss of earnings suffered by your members, with the average claim around £4,500.

Some recent examples of success were:

- £20,000 recovered for a sanitary caster who developed a repetitive strain injury.
- £7,500 recovered for a member who developed a tumour on his foot caused by having to stand on tip toes as part of his job.
- Just under £5,000 for a member at an adhesives company who developed pneumonia and pleurisy after being exposed to chemical fumes.
- £70,000 for a machine operator who suffered a significant injury to his wrist and who was off work for 16 months.

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Mr Cogan pointed out that claims were also made for retired members. "We agreed a settlement of £30,000 on behalf of a retired member who suffered serious injury in a road traffic accident, not an accident at work."

He said that Tinsdills was currently pursuing a large number of claims for loss of hearing suffered by members in the workplace, many of them on behalf of retired members.

Searching

"These are not easy claims to make. Often the company or the factory is no longer in existence and it's difficult to establish the level of noise people were exposed to. We can help by finding people who had worked with the claimant, finding those with similar problems and searching for the insurance companies who looked after the risk at the time."

He stressed that only with the support of Unity could people afford to make a personal injury claim.

"Although there may be changes in future to the laws affecting personal injury claims, what has not changed is that you have a 'premiership' trade union fighting for you, which is something you can be proud of."

Your delegates put officials on the spot

Congress gives workplace reps an opportunity to quiz union officials, including the general secretary, on items in the annual accounts. Here are some of the questions they asked.

Why have staff costs risen?

The slight increase in head office salaries was due to a pay increase in 2008/09.

Does the union have an ethical policy for its investments?

We try to be ethically responsible in our investments but do not have a list of companies we don't invest in. However, this issue is constantly under review.

What is the political fund?

Out of the 52 weekly contributions paid by members, two go into a political fund, as in most unions. At the moment Unity has a policy of supporting the Labour Party. Members can decide to contract out of the political fund if they wish.

Why did unemployment payments to members go up from £3,624 in 2008 to £20,768 in 2009?

This was due to the large number of redundancies in the ceramics sector, mainly but not exclusively at Wedgwood.

The pension scheme for officers seems excessive. Why is this?

The pension scheme for officers and staff is, like all pension schemes, very expensive to run. All of the costs incurred are agreed by the union's executive.

Why did the Ceramic Resource Centre's income drop in 2009?

Actually the CRC averages a £3,000 surplus year on year so it is not a financial drain on Unity. The CRC has been in existence for 10 years and gives a good service to members, especially those made redundant. It has enhanced the reputation of this union nationally.

Lynne's plea for Labour to regain its soul

Opening Conference general president Lynne Huson (right) reminded delegates that in the past two years the union had been faced with considerable redundancies, closures and short-time working.

"This was against a backdrop of a global recession. While outsourcing has had a major effect on businesses, in some cases this is keeping some companies afloat."

Referring to the result of the recent general election, she said it gave a clear indication that voters were uncertain of who they wanted to govern the country, and made a plea to the newly-elected Labour MP for Stoke Central, Tristram Hunt, who attended the conference.

"On behalf of conference, go back to Labour headquarters with this request. Become a party that trade unions and ordinary working people have respect for."

Committed

She pointed out that the union's two recruiters were absent. "April and Issy have been totally committed in trying to recruit members into the union. It has been an uphill struggle and sometimes demoralising for them as in 2010 workers still live in fear of their employers."

"In April the NEC made the difficult decision to close the recruitment department. I can-

not say anything else in relation to this matter as consultations are still taking place."

Ms Huson had praise for the Union Learning Fund, stressing that it has enabled the union to train more learning reps as well as site reps, often with the help of IT equipment they can take on site.

"The fund lets us provide members with guidance and help with their education and training."

She ended by thanking the NEC, officers and staff for their help in allowing her to carry out her duties as general president, saying she was proud and privileged to serve the members of an historic and independent trade union.

