



Conference Report

27-29 May 2008, Bournemouth



One union...

08



...to make you feel proud

Welcome... to the reported highlights of the second National Biennial Community Delegates Conference – the first time the union has visited Bournemouth as Community.

Chairing the conference were President Keren Bender and Vice President Gareth Davies. The conference welcomed around 150 delegates from branches throughout the country and visiting delegates from unions in North America, Australia, Europe and India. Guest speakers included TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber, Denis MacShane MP, Neil Kearney of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation, Rob Johnson of the International Metalworkers' Federation and Peter Scherrer from the European Metalworkers' Federation.

High on the agenda were: the union's recent restructuring; how it was forging strong alliances with sister organisations around the world; its growing ability to inform and influence government policy; and its role in electing a fourth-term Labour Government.

Delegates discussed and debated issues relevant to the union membership and workers across Britain, voted on a wide range of motions, took part in extended debates and had the opportunity to attend a number of fringe meetings. Read on to find out more...

Different structures, same values

In her presidential address to conference, **Keren Bender** told delegates how proud she was to stand up as President of 'a great traditional yet progressive union that stands for dignity and respect.'

'We've been through a programme of change to secure our future as an independent union,' she explained, 'and taken some difficult decisions but I believe reorganising the union's structures and enhancing member services will make it stronger.' Structures may have changed, she said but the reasons for being a union member were the same – 'solidarity, protection and negotiation for better working conditions are still at the core of what we do'.

She also spoke of the need to support the Labour Government through thick and thin. 'We must do all we can to see Labour win the next general election. Community has had a massive influence over the party's agenda since 1997 and we must continue to do so. The most effective way to do this is to join the party, be active and have your say.'



Modern, strong and independent

'Respect the past... create the future', the theme of the last biennial conference, is exactly what the union has been doing since then, explained General Secretary **Michael Leahy**. 'We've grown from a union based on traditional industries to a modern union of both old and new, with a new structure that will ensure we remain a strong, truly independent union.'



Outlining some of the union's achievements over the past two years, he mentioned the mergers with NUDAGO and BUSWE, the new Member Service Centre, the outstanding pensions victory, Communitas' work in retraining and reskilling workers, and the union's work in the community such as its Welsh drug and alcohol pilot project.

Michael told delegates that much of this was only possible under a Labour government. He urged delegates to vote Labour at the next election and reminded them of the Tories' appalling record on employment, anti-union legislation and public service funding. 'We've been an honest, close and sometimes critical friend to Labour and have a continuing duty to influence the policy debate and help the party reconnect with its core voters up and down the country.'

He also highlighted the effect that global economic instability is having on all our lives and talked of the union's strengthened links with sister organisations across Europe and internationally. 'We understand the importance of forging strong alliances across the world to defend other workers' rights and protect ourselves,' he explained.

The way ahead for Community, he said, was to provide the best services for its members, take community unionism into the heart of the community, stay at the centre of the British union movement and to continue reaching out to vulnerable workers needing its protection.

Mayor praises union's approach

Bournemouth's Mayor Councillor **Ann Filer** welcomed delegates to the seaside town by saying how impressed she was with Community's inclusive, forward-looking approach.



'Working lives in 21st century have been transformed; people have to work longer hours for less pay, less job security,' she said. 'Your union has adapted to this and, as well as improving members' employment conditions and providing learning opportunities, it is committed to working with and involving local, diverse communities – sentiments that I share.' She said she was certain Community would help build stronger, more supportive neighbourhoods in the future.

Mixed picture in sectors

'A mixed industrial picture reflecting the union's diversity,' was how National Officer **Roy Rickhuss** described the situation across the sectors where Community has members.



Thousands of jobs had been lost in manufacturing since 2006, he reported; those at Alphasteel, Trostre and Remploy had hit Community members hard but the union had saved hundreds of jobs and helped redundant workers back into employment. However, the outlook was becoming more positive, he said, and 'Community would continue to press the Government to support a renewed UK manufacturing sector that was still vital to our economy and society.'

High demand from Asia and China meant that prospects for the UK steel industry hadn't been so good for years, Roy said. He reported that restructuring and high demand from construction made the wire industry's future seem positive. For the NLBD section the battle continued to oppose Remploy factory closures, while in the footwear and carpet sectors high demand had led to new jobs and renewed optimism. In the betting sector, Community had continued to campaign for safer working conditions and recruited hundreds of new members.

'The key to success for Community is, and always will be, representing its members' interests at work,' he said 'and the union is continuing to work with the TUC, the Government and other organisations to do just that.'

Going local

A call for Community to have a more local presence was led by **Paul Richardson** of the new NSPCC branch, Region 6, on behalf of Brenda Clarke.



He spoke of how Brenda's experience of the positive impact of community-based drop-in centres had led her to believe that Community 'shops' could be a way of maximising support for members, recruiting new ones and building on its community links. He proposed that the NEC support a pilot project and assess its impact and resource implications.

Ashokkumar Patel from Region 6 Community (Leicester) backed this view, asking the NEC to consider if the regions should be given a greater share of the resources to grow the union.

Motion 2 was carried.

Organising vital to growing union

With new systems and structures in place, Community is geared up to tackle the challenges of the changing world of work and to seize opportunities to organise and recruit in new areas, explained Director of Organising **Lee Cash**.



Over the last two years, as well as maintaining collective strength in traditional manufacturing industries, the union had recruited members from a wide range of sectors including social care, football management, and the voluntary sector, he reminded delegates. The key to this, he explained, was in sharing our vision of community unionism with progressively minded organisations. Not only had organising initiatives delivered new members and collective agreements but some, like its Safer Betting Shop campaign in Scotland, had raised Community's profile nationally and with the Government.

'Organising is vital to growing the union, disseminating best practice, representing the interests of members and their communities, and for Community's future,' he added.

Pensions will remain union priority

Community's five-year battle for pension rights, which ended with a £12 billion fund, the biggest ever union success, dominated the agenda. General Secretary **Michael Leahy** said, 'protecting members' pensions and negotiating schemes for un pensioned workers would remain a union priority'.

'Without Community, those who had worked and paid in pension contributions for decades at Allied Steel and Wire and other companies would only have receive 10%,' he explained. 'But now, they have 90% and can look forward to a better quality of retirement. Our win will also protect the pensions of workers in the future if companies go bust.' He then talked of the continuing negotiations with Corus and other companies over pensions and concluded by saying there were still a few rounds in the pension bout to go.

Paul Simmonds, Cardiff CELSA, Region 5, came to the rostrum to praise Community members for backing the pension campaign. 'You brought Labour to accountability and through negotiation made MPs listen,' he said. As a former Amicus member, who joined Community because of its campaign, Paul said he was proud of what his union had achieved.

Rebuilding trade unionism

Keep up the good work, keep fighting for your members and keep making a difference, TUC General Secretary **Brendan Barber** told Community delegates.

'Your union is already leading community trade unionism and modernising to meet the challenges of the 21st century,' he explained.

He talked of Community's success – its growth through the mergers with NUDAGO and BUSWE, its expansion into new sectors, its work with Communitas and its ground-breaking pension campaign and £12 billion victory – 'proof that the interests of individual workers are best advanced through collective action', he said.

Celebrate these successes, he told delegates, but don't ignore the challenges posed by globalisation and the decline of the UK manufacturing industry. He urged members to push the Government to develop 'an intelligent industrial strategy that delivers for manufacturers in key sectors and sustains skilled jobs and the communities they support'.

To secure a historic fourth term, the Labour Party must develop an imaginative policy agenda – and unions have a part in that - based once again on equality, fairness, and social justice, he said. 'Whatever happens in Westminster, we as trade unionists, must continue to advance our members' interests, reach out to a new generation of trade unionists and rebuild union organisation where it is needed the most.'



Investing in organising is a good bet

To build on the union's highly successful betting industry organising work, **John Brigden** from Ladbrokes 08, Region 8, moved Motion 1, calling for a massive investment to create a large team of organisers. He praised Community's organising work in Scotland and the south east in leading the Safer Betting Shop campaign and getting politicians on board, but pointed out the further 30,000 potential members in the sector who needed representation and an organising structure to support them.

John Formstone, Coral 08, Region 8, added that as the sector had no history of trade unionism more resources were needed to tackle the fear of joining a union.

Deputy General Secretary Peter Crowe responding on behalf of the NEC said that while 'Community is fully committed to supporting its members in the betting industry... allocation of union resources was best left to the NEC.'

Motion 1 was remitted, with the NEC assuring conference that it would bear the terms of the motion in mind in developing the union's organising and recruitment policies.



H&S in a healthy place

Health and safety at work and the environment had been high priorities across the sectors Community's members work in, explained **Rob Sneddon**, Head of Health and Safety.

He cited examples such as the union's work with Corus in developing its alcohol and drugs misuse policy and with the Live Wire initiative to reduce accidents in the wire industry. Community had continued to train H&S reps and there was now one rep for every 60 members – a record to be proud of, said Rob.

He also spoke of Community's continued involvement with the Health and Safety Executive and in TUC health and safety activities and of its representations to Government on areas such as corporate liability, the Gangmasters Bill and improved rights for health and safety reps.

On the environment, as well as participating in the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee, the union had been working with Corus and the Carbon Trust on an energy efficiency improvement programme. It had also played a prominent part in the development of the EU Emissions Trading scheme.

'We're in a healthy position on health and safety, thanks to all our reps. Now we want to build on this so that prevention of ill health and elimination of hazards is at the heart of this agenda,' he concluded.

Region 2's Geoff Waterfield, Teesside Staff 05 and Stephen Pearson, South Teesside 01, Region 2, called for the union to keep H&S reps' training up to date and in line with legislative changes, and to provide them with more support.

Ending the postcode lottery

Jan Bownes, Presteigne Branch, Region 5, asked why the quality of health, education and public services depended on where you live? She called on conference to press for an end to the 'postcode lottery', which she believed kept people from bettering their situation. 'As a union, we believe in equality for all people,' she commented, 'so we must support equal access to public services for all.'

Region 5's Gareth Jones from Cardiff CELSA Branch, backed Jan's call saying it was time the 'N' in NHS stood for National'.

Motion 22 was carried.





Dealing with drug and alcohol misuse

National Officer Roy Rickhuss (right) chaired the first ever conference extended debate which was on the theme of drug and alcohol misuse. Joining him (right to left) were Head of Health and Safety Rob Sneddon, MP for Bassetlaw John Mann and Neil Walters, drug and alcohol campaign co-ordinator in Corus Port Talbot.

The situation

- Drug and alcohol addiction is a national problem that affects not just the addict but their family, friends, workmates, employers and communities
- 40,000 deaths per year are alcohol-related and alcohol-related illness costs the NHS £3 billion a year
- Around 14 million working days are lost annually due to alcohol abuse
- The cost of drug abuse in terms of crime, absenteeism and sickness is in excess of £20 billion a year.

What Community can do

Community's drugs and alcohol counselling project with Corus Strip Products is a model for other unions and the Government, said John Mann, 'one that looks beyond the workplace and empowers communities to tackle the issue.' The debate established a number of ways in which Community is already helping and could further help tackle the problem, including:

- extending the Port Talbot drug and alcohol pilot to other regions in the UK
- engaging with employers to develop and implement drug and alcohol policies in every workplace – and monitoring and reviewing these
- working with employers to encourage workers with alcohol and drug problems to come forward by removing fear of dismissal or disciplinary action
- educating members and the community about the issue
- providing drug and alcohol counselling training for health and safety reps
- lobbying the Government for changes in drug and alcohol legislation
- working with community groups to provide support for families affected by drug and alcohol issues.

Tackling addiction



With an estimated 70% of people in employment in the UK abusing alcohol and 20% abusing drugs, this is a national issue we can't ignore, said **Neil Walters**, from Llanwern Staff and Administration Branch in Region 6.

As lead counsellor of the Port Talbot drugs and alcohol project, Neil spoke of the associated problems – poor physical and mental health, family break-ups, lost work days and a greater risk of accident at work – that need to be addressed too.

He spoke of the Port Talbot project's success in helping many workers back to work and urged the NEC to adapt the scheme around the country so all our members could access similar counselling services. 'The UK has a huge culture of drug and alcohol misuse, and our members face enormous pressure in society; they deserve nothing less than our proactive support.'

Joe Monks, District 02 Branch, Region 5, added his support for the motion. 'Drugs and alcohol are destroying our lives and communities every week, everyday,' he explained. 'The Port Talbot project helps members deal with their problems while remaining proactive members of society and is a prime example of community unionism at its best.'

The NEC's Richard Green questioned whether Community should push for strong policies to curtail the use of alcohol not just deal with the aftermath. 'People addicted to drugs and alcohol can pose a health and safety threat at work' he added, saying that he was in favour of random testing at work to confront the problem.

Motion 14 was carried.

Attending her first Community conference, **Margaret Wotherspoon**, from Region 1's Coral 01 Branch said: 'We betting shop workers are new to the union and I didn't know what reaction we'd get. But Community made it clear that it wants to work with us,' she explained. 'Conference has motivated me to ensure that all betting shop staff in my area know that Community will be supporting our struggle for recognition and better working conditions.'



Labour's fate in your hands

'The fate of the Government is in your hands,' **Denis MacShane**, MP for Rotherham, told delegates. Trade unions should work to expose Tory anti-union politics now, not wait until the next general election before supporting Labour.



It was up to trade unions like Community to fight back for the Labour Party, he said, and help the party reconnect with its voters. Otherwise working people, unions and Britain would suffer under a Tory Government. 'The Tories don't have the answers - they have no understanding of the problems facing working people.' He warned delegates that communities in the North, Midlands and Wales 'are not even on the Tories' sat-nav.'

He did admit that the Labour Party needed to reinvent itself for the 21st century, looking at more 'made-to-measure' rather than 'one size fits all' policies devised in Whitehall', he explained.

Protecting temporary workers' rights

There is a danger of employers creating a two-tier workforce, with some workers having employment rights but many not, if we don't stand up for the rights of temporary and agency workers, explained **Kevin Edwards**, Matthey Royston Works Branch, Region 8.



'If bosses think they can replace permanent, unionised staff with a mish-mash of temp and agency workers who have no rights, then many will do so,' he added. Kevin said we should welcome temporary workers into the union and give them the same employment rights and protection others enjoy.

Paul McKenna, Corby 11 Branch, Region 6, seconded the motion, adding that temporary workers are among the lowest paid and most vulnerable workers in the UK, and an attack on their rights is an attack on ours. He said he welcomed the Government's extended protection for temporary workers but felt there was still more to do.

Speaking on behalf of the NEC, Deputy General Secretary Peter Crowe said the union welcomed the Government's new temporary workers legislation and was proud of the part its survey evidence had played in bringing that about. The union would continue to campaign for all working people full-time or agency, he said.

Motion 4 was carried.

Equal rights for temporary workers

Stuart Sansome from Region 3's Aldwarke 01, moved Motion 16 calling for an end to the exploitation of temporary and agency workers.

'It's unfair and immoral that they are paid less for the same work, have no rights to a company pension or redundancy pay but are expected to contribute in the same way as workers with full employment rights,' he explained. He also mentioned that bad treatment of temporary workers could undermine the rights of full-time workers. Stuart called on the union to actively recruit agency workers into our union, as 'representation is essential to protect these vulnerable employees'. However, he said, it was only possible for the union to protect all members equally when they are treated equally in law.

Joe Mann said that Community had made an important contribution to the Temporary and Agency Workers Bill. While that was a step in the right direction, he said, the union would continue to put these workers' cases to Government and to recruit them into the union. He added that Community would be calling for the Gangmasters' Licensing Authority, which currently works only in certain sectors, to operate across all sectors.

Motion 16 was carried.

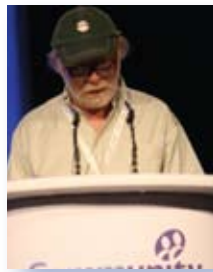
Paying tribute to Peter

Michael Leahy and former President Tracy Clarke paid tribute to Deputy General Secretary **Peter Crowe** who will retire before the next conference.



Peter joined KFAT in 1976, became full-time officer in the Midlands and then District Secretary of Nottingham area with 12,000 members. He joined Community in 2004 when KFAT and the ISTC merged, and has been Deputy General Secretary since 2007. Over the last 18 months he has played a major role in consulting with members to develop the union's strategy which has led to the important changes in its structure. Tracy Clarke thanked Peter on behalf of Region 6 for his work as a former KFAT officer and for the support he gave her that had enabled her to play a more active role in the union.

Underpaid, undervalued and over here



Don't believe all you read, **Steve Bevan**, Trade Frames Branch, Region 5, warned delegates, speaking of the media demonisation of migrant workers that focused on job losses, lower wages and reduced benefits.

He spoke of the need for a more balanced view of immigration and said evidence showed that migrant workers create jobs not take them away, pay more in taxes than they take out in benefits and are one of the most exploited groups of workers in the UK. He added that exploitation of non-unionised workers – migrant or otherwise – affects pay and conditions for all. Community should welcome migrant workers into our union, he said, and support them in their new workplaces and communities.

John Pitman, Pittards Branch, Region 5, seconded the motion, adding that with its community focus, our union was the best union to help migrant workers integrate into their workplaces and new neighbourhoods.

Pat Keenan, responding for the NEC said that Community had already recruited a number of migrant worker members across the country and would do all it could to support them and to attract other vulnerable workers to join us.

Motion 5 was carried.

Forging global links

'Forming the right alliances, identifying opportunities and influencing global change is in our members' interest,' General Secretary Michael Leahy explained.

'We live in a globalised world and that means issues like climate change, labour standards, or trade can't be dealt with in the UK alone. That's why Community has stepped up its involvement with international organisations.'

The focus of the union's international work was to manage the forces of globalisation, he explained, so that 'we limit the effect on our members and help our sister organisations to grow'. Stronger unions across the world make it more difficult for multinationals to exploit workers, he said.

He said he didn't believe global unions were the answer to globalisation. A way with more chance of winning, he said, was to 'help our sister unions in the developing world build their capacity and create viable unions to defend their members' interests and ours.'



Community Biennial Awards

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber presented Community's Biennial Awards in the following categories:

The **Young Member Award** went to **Robin Glen** of Corus Corby, Region 6, an active member of Corus CPT and branch ULR, for his hard work in promoting union learning in the workplace.

The **Branch Officer Award** went to **Calvin Evans**, an NLBD branch official at Rhonda Cannon Taff. Region 5, who, in the face of problems at work, had managed to recruit a full complement of officers, increase membership and hold regular meetings.

The **Lifelong Learning Award** went to **Bob Hudson** from Corus Aldwarke 01 Branch, Region 3, for his work in setting up a learning centre on the site.

The **Organising Award** went to **James Beadle**, member of Ladbroke's 08 Branch, Region 8, who has actively encouraged others to join and raised issues as an elected member of the staff council. John Formstone collected the award on his behalf.

The **Activist Award** went to **Brian Silver** – a union member for 39 years, one-time NEC member, committed activist and 'face' of the ASW pensions campaign – for all his contributions to the union.

Cheap clothes cost dear

There's no such thing as cheap clothes and footwear, **Neil Kearney**, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF) told delegates. The real cost of record profits and fat-cat bonuses is the abuse of workers in developing countries.



He talked of workers in Bangladesh slaving for 33p per day stitching sport shirts, the 40,000 fingers broken or lost each year in the South China textile industry, and the increasing use of child labour – the results of governments outlawing legitimate union activities to keep wages low.

After two decades of attacks on unions, declining wages and working conditions, workers are starting to fight back, he said, but to support them we need to form global agreements between global union federations and multinational companies that make access to world markets dependent on international labour standards being upheld.

Protecting workers in the UK and across the world won't hinder world trade, Neil said, it will improve living standards worldwide and build global security. 'Globally we want to see the UK Government standing up for workers instead of being laggards in EU and other international institutions,' he said.

For more information on this issue, visit www.community-tu.org (textile and equality sections), www.cleanclothes.org or www.labourbehindthelabel.org.

Educating reps is vital to union

National Officer **Roy Rickhuss** told delegates that education was vital if branch officials and reps were to 'deliver the first-class services our members deserve'.



'New reps, better trained are the lifeblood of our union. We must do all we can to support them in fulfilling their roles,' he said. He explained that Community is investing heavily in training its officials – with standards improving and the numbers trained growing.

He called on all members to make the learning agenda an integral part of branch work not an add-on, otherwise, he warned, 'employers would do the least they needed to in terms of training our members'. He also reminded delegates of the threat a Tory government would pose to education, withdrawing funding so that initiatives like the Union Learning Fund were likely to disappear.

Skills key to competing globally



'The Government must save our manufacturing industry before it is too late,' said **Rajinder Sagoo**, Remploy Pinxton Branch, Region 6.

'Manufacturing remains critical to Britain's economic health but it is now decreasing faster here than in any other European country,' she said. As UK business shouldn't try to compete with cheaper labour costs in India and China by exploiting workers or damaging the environment, the Government must intervene to create a favourable economic climate for business and ensure we have the skills base to compete, she added.

Pat Wiggins, Thames Steel, Region 8, said high quality, skilled work done by skilled workers was where Britain could compete in the global arena but that could only be achieved where pay and conditions are good. 'We need to reach out to workers around the world to raise their awareness of core labour standards and support their efforts to build trade unions,' he explained.

Replying on behalf of the NEC, Helen Elliott said that Community would continue campaigning nationally for greater investment in its members' training and internationally for their industries, 'as we know our solidarity protects ourselves and others'.

Motion 6 was carried.

Call for councillor courses

As an elected councillor in Rotherham, **Glyn Whelbourn** from South Yorkshire Community 01 Branch in Region 3, expressed his disappointment at the lone mention of local government in the conference agenda. He called on Community to consider running seminars to get people interested in local government and in national politics and to increase its donation to local Labour parties so they could campaign all year round.



Working together

Mike Bradley, General Secretary of the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) told delegates of the long-standing relationship between his organisation and Community, whose officials and members had contributed greatly to its research and education and training work.



Since 1997 the GFTU had accessed more than £2 million in government funding through a range of learning and education funds, he told delegates, and that had been used to benefit representatives from affiliated unions such as Community.

The GFTU was now preparing for Warwick 2 in July, he said, ready to discuss union members' concerns with the Labour Party for its next manifesto and he'd like to see a discussion on tax relief on union contributions, which could help union members and trade union finances.

High cost of workplace bullying

Bullying and harassment is an issue too costly to ignore, said Region 1's **Tom Donnelly**, from Clydesdale Q&T Branch, both in terms of human suffering and lost productivity. However, most employers seemed unable or unwilling to stop it.



'All workplaces, whatever their size, should have a policy that enables victims to be supported and listened to – not deemed 'workplace wimps', he added. He called on Community to campaign through the TUC for zero tolerance of bullying and harassment in the workplace.

Motion 11 was carried.



As a first-timer at conference, **Tristan Learoyd** from Teesside Community Branch, Region 2, enjoyed 'getting a view of Community's international links.'

A senior lecturer in pharmaceuticals, Tristan joined Community through Labour Party contacts because he was impressed by the union's work in Teesside. 'I'd like to see more Community members get actively involved in helping the party reconnect with its core voters.', he said.

Taking a stand on workplace bullying

Community's Rob Sneddon (left) chaired Wednesday's extended debate on bullying and harassment at work. The speakers included Matt Witheridge of the Andrea Adams Trust (centre) and Paul Pearson, Director of the UK Leather Federation (right).



The situation

- 87% workers said they were bullied or were aware of it in their workplace
- Bullying is rarely about violence but persistent persecutory behaviour
- Bullying affects people physically and emotionally and impacts on their personal and working lives
- 8.9 million days are lost each year due to bullying

What Community is doing

Community is working in partnership with organisations like the Andrea Adams Trust to develop the union's strategy and policies on this issue. It believes unions play a vital role in dealing with and raising awareness of bullying and harassment at work and is committed to:

- including bullying and harassment training for the union's health and safety reps
- supporting the annual Anti-Bullying at Work campaign
- undertaking surveys among betting industry workers and contributing to the TUC's study on vulnerable workers to raise the profile of the issue nationally
- working with employers to develop bullying and harassment policies
- raising awareness among employees of what bullying is and how to recognise it.

What you can do

- Visit www.andreaadamstrust.co.uk for more information
- Call head office for a copy of Community's guide to workplace bullying
- Download guidance notes at www.community-tu.org.

Enabling shiftworkers to retire at 50



Rob Middlemas, Skinningrove FD 02, Region 2, moved Motion 9 calling on the union to lobby the Government to make shift workers exempt from the 2010 legislation. This law would mean an end to shift workers retiring at 50 with an occupational pension and increase the retirement age to 55. Other groups such as the police and fire brigade are exempt, he said, so why not steel men, too?

Bob Hudson, Aldwarke 01, Region 3, seconded the motion and talked about the poor health of shift workers and higher rates of premature death. 'By 55 many of these workers will have done over 35 years on shifts,' he said. 'We have a moral obligation to make their lives easier in later life.'

Sue Mathers responded on behalf of the NEC saying that pensions issues were complex and that the NEC supported the motion with reservations. Community, she assured conference, would continue to 'fight for its members' pension rights and to ensure you have a decent pension'.

Motion 9 was carried.

Ending poverty in old age



'The UK is the richest country in Europe yet pays the worst pensions,' said Colin Green, Region 6 Free Members Branch. He said that today's pensioners had rebuilt this country after World War II and deserved a pension that would give them dignity and respect. 'That's why we are asking the NEC to give retired members the backing to put an end to poverty in old age,' he explained.

Jitu Depala, NLBD, London General seconded the motion saying that 20% of UK pensioners are living below the poverty line. 'They work hard during their lives yet are ignored when it comes to pensions,' he said.

Tracy Clarke responding for the NEC said Community welcomed the Government's restoration of the earnings link to pensions and was pressing to bring forward that date to 2012. The union was very aware of the issues on pensions, she said, and would continue to tackle them.

Motion 10 was carried.

Fighting to save blind workers' jobs



'It's a disgrace that at a time when there are few job opportunities for disabled people, Labour was closing 20 Remploy factories, with a loss of 2,000 jobs,' said Brian Sneddon from Region 1's NLBD Glasgow Branch. He called on the union to defend blind and visually impaired members' jobs and campaign for an increase in the number of jobs available through the Government's Workstep scheme.

This motion was seconded by **Andy Laing**, from the NLBD Aberdeen Branch, and an employee at Glencraft's supported factory in the city that Community is fighting to keep open. 'Finding work in today's climate is bad enough but as a blind or visually impaired person it's even more difficult. Employers needed to be more aware of the problems we face and have more support from the Government to address them,' he commented.

Robert Mooney responded on behalf of the NEC saying that Community had met with the Department of Work and Pensions about the proposed Workstep changes and the union's input had helped secure grants for supported factories for the next several years. The motion was carried.



The admirable Crichton

Ian Crichton from Region 2's Teesside Middle Management Branch received Community's Man of Steel award for his outstanding service to the union. Ian joined the union in 1973 and held various positions but his major work was guiding his branch through the threat of works closure. 'It is a tribute to him and the other reps that we still have steel making in Teesside,' said Michael Leahy who presented the award.

The jewel in our crown

'Communitas is unique in the trade union movement,' said Communitas' Chief Executive **Lyndon Peach**. 'Set up to provide redundancy support as Steel Partnership Training, we've helped thousands of workers back into work. Unfortunately that support is still needed due to the declining manufacturing sector,' he explained, 'and we are committed to providing it.'

On a more upbeat note, he said that Communitas had contributed significantly to delivering the Government's lifelong learning agenda through its project work, learning centres, trained ULRs, providing free access to IT, numeracy and literacy courses for Community members and empowering them as individuals.

He told delegates that Communitas' key future priorities were to develop new projects to engage with local communities, to diversify into new services that can generate income, to continue its research and evaluation work, and share best practice with other unions in Europe.



Equality is at our heart

'Equality is at the heart of every agenda Community works on and we're here to level the playing field and campaign to secure equal rights for all,' explained National Officer **Joe Mann**.

He paid tribute to the union's equality initiatives such as Region 3's Pat Keenan's work on the anti-BNP Hope not Hate campaign and the gains in equality representation union members had made by their election to the TUC Black Workers, Youth and Disability committees.

The major campaign, he said, had been disabled workers' employment rights, which had been led by Region 5's Colin Tait. He added that it was Community's job now to ensure supported factories, like those run by Remploy, are given the resources to succeed and members keep their jobs. 'We need to look at new options and consider if, for example, Communitas could take on the contract for disabled factories,' he concluded.



Call for repeal of Tory anti-union laws

With the threat of a Tory government looming, John Brigden, Ladbroke's 08, Region 8, said it was imperative that conference supported Motion 21 asking the Labour Government to repeal all previous Tory anti-union legislation and to introduce positive union laws.

He spoke of how, in his company, recruiting new members was difficult as 50% of staff leave or are dismissed every year, making it nigh on impossible to gain recognition through the '50% plus one' law.

Speaking on behalf of the NEC, National Officer Joe Mann asked the mover to remit the motion because it ignored the positive changes that the Labour Party had introduced. The mover agreed and the motion was remitted.

Prioritising the equality agenda

Moved by **Claire Main** from the Meridian Branch, Region 2, Motion 15 called for equalities to be a key priority in the union's growth strategy and in workplace negotiations. Claire told delegates that the gender gap in pay was still an issue and that women workers were realising that unions are the way forward on this. She spoke of the new equality opportunities offered by BUSWE members joining Community and the need for more resources to fight against the British National Party (BNP) to support NLBD branches working to save jobs and to develop young members.

Motion 15 was carried.

Review of the Gambling Act is on the cards



'It's time to review and adjust the 2005 Gambling Act so bookmakers are forced to act with social responsibility,' said **John Formstone**, Coral Bookmakers, Region 8.

For staff the act had meant longer, more unsociable hours for the same pay, he said, and the new fixed odds betting terminals had created a generation of younger gambling addicts and anti-social behaviour in shops. 'The motion isn't suggesting gambling should be abolished,' John said, 'but that the act has failed to properly regulate the betting industry or protect gamblers.'

John Brigden, Ladbrokes 08, Region 8, seconded the motion, talking of the effects problem gambling had on the community, such as debt, the strain on gamblers' families and the dangers betting shop staff faced. 'The union can help make the act fit for purpose rather than a means of bookmakers making profits at the expense of vulnerable people,' he concluded.

Peter Crowe speaking on behalf of the NEC said it supported a comprehensive review of the impact of the Gambling Act and would make representations at appropriate levels.

Motion 8 was carried.

Protecting employees in the betting industry



Margaret Wotherspoon from William Hill 01 Branch, Region 1, shared with delegates the frightening experience of an armed robbery at her betting shop, its effect on her life and the company's lack of support. She said her experience was only one of hundreds of daily incidents that go unreported. 'Betting staff are physically and verbally abused often by customers with drug, alcohol and gambling addictions. We are just expected to put up with it, she added, 'and senior management in the Big 3 are reluctant to address this growing problem.'

Everyone should have the right to be safe at work, she said, and asked Community to mount a national campaign to set minimum safety and welfare standards, establish employer compliance legislation and reverse the 'acceptance' of abuse of betting shop workers.

Pat Donnelly replying on behalf of the NEC said that the union would continue taking the concerns of its betting shop members to the highest level, working with the Government to change how the industry treats its workers.

Motion 13 was carried.

Call for equal employment rights across the EU

Tom Donnelly, Clydesdale Q&T Branch, Region 1, moved Motion 18 calling for the union to campaign with the TUC for British workers to have the same employment rights as their EU counterparts. 'The Tory government set out to break the unions and imposed restrictive legislation and, while the Labour Party has made a fairer UK in terms of trade union rights there hasn't been enough progress,' he explained.

Jim Sinclair, Lanarkshire CB, Region 1, seconded the motion saying that there was too much red tape in industrial relations law and that it was years out of date and failed to reflect the changes in the economy and modern ownership.

On behalf of the NEC, Peter Crowe said it would support Motion 18 but defended the Labour Party achievements in office - the right to union recognition won and unfair dismissal. 'The NEC doesn't think the laws are perfect but what would we have if we had a Tory government in power?' he asked.

Motion 18 was carried.

Meeting members from different regions and sectors was the highlight for conference first-timer **Linda McWhinnie** of Region 1's Dalzell 03 Branch. 'You realise that you share many of the same issues,' explained Linda, 'but you can learn from how they've dealt with them. As one of the growing minority of women members at conference, I'd encourage others to come along and find out more about the union.'



Thinking internationally



'International work isn't an optional extra for trade unions,' **Rob Johnson** from the International Metalworkers Federation told delegates. 'Globalisation is a real issue that must be dealt with everyday.'

He said that, as trade unionists, we had a duty to go beyond international minimum standards. 'The way transnational companies treat their workers is a disgrace,' he exclaimed. As an example, he spoke of aluminium firm Alcoa, whose Mexican operation announced redundancies so it could take work to Honduras, pay lower wages and exploit non-unionised workers.

On a more positive note he talked of recent gains the IMF had made, such as the global minimum safety standards agreement with German firm Arcelor Mittal which employs 338,000 workers worldwide. He said our role as trade unionists was to ensure that working conditions for future generations continued to improve.

Rob said he wasn't concerned about the future of the trade union movement. 'At the companies and union conferences I visit, I see a passion for trade unionism – and we can build on that.'

Energy strategy needs innovative and bold approach



'We need innovative, bold solutions to climate change which threatens the planet and the future of energy-intensive industries like steel, Region 2's **Ian Crichton** from Teesside Middle Management Branch told delegates.

Tackling climate change involved both reducing energy consumption and harnessing greener energy sources such as underground coal gasification. Ian welcomed the lead that steel company Corus had shown in developing its strategy on climate change and urged other companies to follow suit. He also spoke of the role we as union members have to conserve energy at home and in the workplace. 'It's here and now we must start being proactive,' Ian said. 'Steel workers' futures and those of your families depend on us acting now.'

He called on the union to press the Government to develop a fuller picture of all energy options, to raise the issues facing manufacturing and to develop a more integrated, sustainable energy policy.

Richard Green replied on behalf of the NEC, saying that Community would continue playing a prominent part nationally and internationally on the issue of climate change, from working with employers to 'green' the workplace to making representations on the next phase of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme.

Motion 7 was carried.



President Keren Bender thanked the youngsters from Linwood Special School and Bethany Junior School who sang for the delegates each morning of conference. She also presented a cheque to Linwood's inclusion co-ordinator Steve Mason and Heather Torrens, Bethany's music teacher to help support their work that enables children of all abilities to share music.

Delegates battle over troops in Iraq



The motion on the removal of troops from Iraq produced powerful arguments on both sides again at this year's conference.

Jim Sinclair of Lanarkshire CB Branch, Region 1, moved the motion saying how we were misled about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, and that despite 10 million people worldwide protesting against it, an illegal war had gone ahead. More than 176 UK soldiers had died in Iraq so far, many from places where Community has members and it was time to bring them all home, he added. His views were also passionately echoed by David Brunelleschi, Beamlight Automotive Branch, Region 6, and Bernard O'Reilly, Tyco Stockport Branch, Region 7, who both have sons fighting in Iraq.

In opposition to the motion, Ian Crichton, Teesside Middle Management Branch, Region 2, said our troops committed in Iraq and Afghanistan were helping to establish human rights and if withdrawn would allow the Taliban and other fundamentalist Islamic organisations to take over.

Joe Mann responded on behalf of the NEC, which recommended delegates oppose the motion. The withdrawal of troops should be a goal for the UK Government but it must be for the right reasons and at the right time, he said.

Motion 20 was defeated.

Co-operation on climate change



Peter Scherrer, General Secretary of the European Metalworkers' Federation, told delegates that the achievement of European Union's CO₂ emissions targets shouldn't be at the expense of the European steel industry and its jobs.

He told delegates how the EMF is working to support EU and ETUC ambitions to ensure emission targets struck a fair balance between preventing climate change and the competitiveness of EU industry and safeguarding members' jobs.

'The way forward for steel and metal industries is to agree a global approach to climate change,' he explained. 'We need to encourage employers to invest in developing new technology and to build up co-operation between workers in Europe and around the world on this issue so that employers don't try to play us off against each other. We need to aim for an industry that sets an example to others, is responsible to workers and trade union rights, takes care of the environment and is profitable,' he added. For that to happen closer European co-operation was still needed and Community, as a member of the EMF, was playing an active part in that.

Justice for Colombia



The third of conference's extended debates was chaired by Liam Craig-Best, Director of Justice for Colombia (JfC). He was joined by Community's Keren Bender and Gareth Davies who visited Colombia as part of a JfC delegation.

The situation

- One union activist is murdered every week in Colombia; others are intimidated, imprisoned without trial, tortured or 'disappear'
- People are scared to join a union – only 4 to 5% of Colombians are union members
- The Colombian government relies on this fear to weaken the trade union movement. The Colombian Army, police and their paramilitary death squads are behind many of these abuses
- The Colombian Army receives military aid and training from UK and US governments
- If we don't stand up for the rights of our Colombian colleagues – unions in Colombia will be wiped out.

What Community is doing

UK unions, including Community and the TUC, established Justice for Colombia five years ago and continue to support its work to provide legal help for imprisoned activists, support recruitment campaigns and arrange UK visits for Colombian trade unionists and for UK groups to visit Colombia. Through the TUC, Community was part of a delegation to the Foreign Office calling for humanitarian not military aid for Colombia.

What you can do

- Visit www.justiceforcolombia.org for more information
- Sign the aid petition at petitions.pm.gov.uk/Colombia/
- Get your branch to affiliate to Justice for Colombia

Stop the sex slave trade



'Every year around 6,000 women and children as young as nine are brought into the UK as sex slaves, abducted or duped by tales of a better life and money,' **Simon Tweedlie** from Border 01 Branch, Region 1, told delegates. 'As a union we have a common commitment to care for human rights and dignity. Around 70% of women in prostitution in the UK are from abroad, and we need to make it clear to clients that there would be no supply if there were no demand.'

Linda McWhinnie, Dalzell 03 Branch, Region 1, seconded the motion. 'Trafficking is about money, power and greed, using these women and children as commodities and then discarding them,' she said. 'Our union can do something about this by raising awareness of the issue in schools, workplaces and at our branch meetings, and working with organisations like the Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance.'

Motion 17 was carried.

'Everyone was very friendly and approachable,' said **Tom Blenkinsop** from Region 2's Teesside Community branch, of his first Community conference. 'While I was nervous about speaking to conference it was a great experience to put my views forward,' said Tom who works for Ashok Kumar MP. 'I enjoyed listening to the debates, knowing that we are setting down principles that will protect us and future generations of workers.'



Conference 08 fringe events

Climate change and the environment

This discussion focused on how trade unions, their members and multinationals can work together to tackle climate change. Hosted by Michael Leahy, speakers included Alan Whitehead MP who spoke on the Government's progress on the issue, Katherine Liddle from Corus who talked about the firm's strategies to improve current processes and introduce 'greener' technology, and the Carbon Trust's David Moore who explained how we all have a role in reducing carbon emissions in our workplace and at home.

For more information, visit www.corusgroup.com, www.carbontrust.co.uk and www.community-tu.org.



Underpaid and over here: migrant workers in the UK

With migrant workers making up to 10% of the working population, how should the union respond? This was one of the issues raised at this meeting which was chaired by Community's Terry Meakin (standing) who has spearheaded work with migrant workers in Region 6. Speakers included TUC South West's Nigel Costly (left) and Nick Graff from recruitment agency Smart Group who have worked closely with Terry. The discussion also considered how the union could encourage migrant workers to join and how to help them integrate into their new workplaces and communities.

For more information, visit www.tuc-org.uk and www.community-tu.org



Unions 21 - What are unions here for?

Hosted by Community's Matt Ball, this session looked at how Unions 21 is asking people across the labour movement to give their opinions on today's trade unions and building unions for the future. Keynote speakers included Denis MacShane MP (right) and Paula Turtle (centre) from USW Canada, and a lively debate ensued, raising questions on recognition, recruitment and retention in the future.

For more information, visit www.unions21.org.uk

Opportunities and challenges for union organising in the new millennium

One of the most successful responses to the fall in union membership across the UK, the TUC Organising Academy was set up in 1998 and Community was one of the first union's to support it. Chaired by Community's Director of Organising Lee Cash, this session considered how Community can build a stable future by learning from its past organising work and promote best practice in its branches. Speakers included Paul Nowak, TUC National Organiser and Dr Emma Wallis from Communitas.

For more information, visit www.tuc.org.uk and www.community-tu.org

Domestic violence

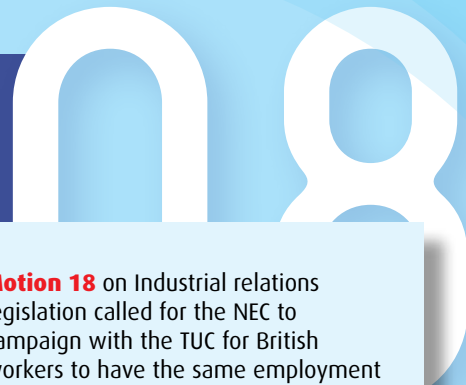
This meeting was an opportunity for our new BUSWE members to share their experiences of the issues that social workers have to deal with on a day-to-day basis. The meeting was chaired by Harry Lyons, former BUSWE General Secretary, speakers included; Narmada Thiranagama, TUC policy officer; Annie Cassie, a former BUSWE member and social worker; and Alex Camm from the NSPCC, who discussed the effects of domestic violence on the victims, their families and the workplace.

Threat of the BNP – Hope not Hate campaign

Across Yorkshire and the West Midlands, Hope not Hate Yorkshire campaigns against the BNP – working with local and regional Labour parties and unions to present a united labour movement response to the fascist threat. Chaired by Community's Steve Stacey, speakers at this session included Paul Meszaros, Hope not Hate co-ordinator and Pat Keenan Community NEC member.

For more information, visit www.hopenothate.org.uk

How the voting went



Motion 1 on Restructuring of Community called for investment in a large team of organisers to build on the knowledge gained from recruiting in the betting industry – remitted to the NEC.

Motion 2 on Community services delivery asked the NEC to consider new methods of servicing members – carried.

Motion 3 on Employment for blind and visually impaired people called on the union to defend these members' jobs and to campaign to increase the number of jobs available through the Government's Workstep scheme – carried.

Motion 4 on Rights for temporary workers called for the NEC to campaign for jobs filled by non-permanent staff to be made available as full-time jobs after 12 months and for temporary workers to be automatically entitled to compensation or redundancy packages based on length of service – carried.

Motion 5 on Migrant workers called on the NEC to attract migrant workers into the union and to help ensure their health and well-being while in the UK – carried.

Motion 6 on Manufacturing and globalisation called on the government to save the UK manufacturing industry and jobs, and to encourage bigger business to invest in textile and other manufacturing industries – carried.

Motion 7 on Energy policy called for the NEC to press the government further on developing a robust, integrated energy policy that included new technology options – carried.

Motion 8 on the Gambling Act 2005 called for the Government to review the Act and its effects on problem and underage gambling and the welfare of betting shop staff – carried.

Motion 9 on Shift working and occupational pensions called for the NEC to press for exemption of employees

in steel and other industries that make heavy demands on shift workers from the minimum pensionable retirement age – carried.

Motion 10 on the State pension called for the NEC to give retired members the necessary backing to put an end to poverty in old age – carried.

Motion 11 on Bullying and harassment in the workplace called for the NEC to campaign through the TUC for zero tolerance of this behaviour at work – carried.

Motion 12 on Rail transport for blind and partially sighted people called on the NEC to press for all rail firms to ensure consistency of open/close buttons on every train – carried.

Motion 13 on Protection of employees in the betting industry called for the NEC to mount a national campaign to set minimum safety and welfare standards, establish employer compliance legislation and reverse the culture of acceptance of abuse of betting shop workers – carried.

Motion 14 on Drug and alcohol misuse called for the NEC to support and extend drug and alcohol initiatives based on the successful Corus Strip Products project to other regions – carried.

Motion 15 on Community's equalities agenda called for equalities to be a key priority in the union's growth strategy and in workplace negotiations – carried.

Motion 16 on Employment rights for agency workers called for the NEC to campaign to end the exploitation of these workers and to ensure they have the same working rights as other workers – carried.

Motion 17 on Child trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children called for the NEC to support and join other organisations in raising awareness of the rise in this 'human trade' – carried.

Motion 18 on Industrial relations legislation called for the NEC to campaign with the TUC for British workers to have the same employment rights as their EU counterparts – carried.

Motion 19 on British troops in Iraq called for the NEC to press the government to remove British troops from Iraq – defeated.

Motion 20 on Colombia called on the Colombian authorities to guarantee trade unionists' rights to assembly, association and freedom of expression in practice and in law – carried.

Motion 21 on The Labour government called for the government to repeal all previous Tory anti-union legislation and to introduce EU positive directives to help unions fight for better working conditions for their members – remitted to take Motion 18.

Motion 22 on Equality of access to public services called on the NEC to press the government for fair provision of public services around the UK and to end the postcode lottery on health – carried.

Motion 23 on Local broadcasting services called on the NEC to add Community's support to other trade unions to save local and regional news broadcasts on independent television – carried.

Motion 24 on Maximum speed zones called for the introduction of maximum 20mph speed zones outside every school to reduce the number of accidents involving school children – carried.

Motion 25 on School buses called for the NEC to press all councils to adopt the American 'yellow school buses' model to protect children travelling to and from school – carried.