

## **UNISON 2019 National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Plus Conference**

15 – 17<sup>th</sup> November 2019, Bournemouth Conference Centre.

Conference report by Gareth Dudley, Branch Equalities Officer

This was Unison's first LGBT plus conference, the plus having been added at NDC in the summer.

### **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> November**

The conference began in the afternoon with a "meet and greet" session with the National LGBT+ Committee. We were then given the choice of a number of workshops and discussion groups to attend, I went for:

- a. Film showing – "Ulster Alien" a thought-provoking film about a young gay man attempting to "come out" in 1970s Northern Ireland and has complicated relationship with his best friend who was in the RUC and struggling with his sexuality.
- b. Drop-in session on "Setting Up a Branch LGBT+ self-organised group. It was a very interested discussion and we heard from branches who had already set group up and appointed separate LGBT+ reps on their branch committees. It is something I will be discussing with our Branch at the next committee meeting

Later in the afternoon I attended a session outlining conference procures followed by the North West regional LGBT+ meeting of delegates.

### **Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November**

Conference proper began at 9.15am with the traditional introduction and welcome, Remember for those who had passed on during the year, election of tellers, annual report.

There was a speech by guest speaker Christina McAnea Unison Assistant General Secretary around bargaining, negotiations, and equalities.

In the afternoon there was a video message from Angela Rayner who was elected to Parliament in 2015.

In the afternoon there was a series of workshops: I attended the one about "Standing for Office" which was for any LGBT+ Unison member who was considering standing for public office such as councillor or MP. This session was very well attended.

### **Debate on Motions**

#### **Mental Health and Suicide Awareness to Support Young LGBT+ Members**

One in eight LGBT+ people aged 18-24 said they have attempted suicide; half of LGPT+ people aged 18-24 have thought about it; almost half of LGBT+ people aged 18-24 have deliberately self-harmed. Conference passed this motion to promote suitable organisations and charities working in the field of mental health and suicide awareness; consider suitable methods to make appropriate training available; provision of materials for pride stalls and other events signposting to support LGBT+ young people within the area of mental health.

### **LGBT+ Hate Crime**

The motion was passed to work on campaign material aimed at combatting LGBT+ hate crime within the workplace; liaise with LGBT+ members in the police and justice service to promote training within their branches; working closer with LGBT+ organisations such as Stonewall; encourage regions to work collaboratively with their local Police and Crime Commissioner.

### **Promoting and Expanding LGBT+ Education in Schools**

This was brought to conference following the protests outside Parkfield Community School in Birmingham and some peoples' opposition to the teaching of Relationship and Sex Education in schools.

The motion was passed – calling on the National LGBT+ committee to raise awareness of LGBT+ relationships and families in the workplace; actively promote positive attitudes; inclusive policies in the workplace; and show solidarity with, and work alongside others to defend LGBT+ education if it comes under attack.

### **Sexual Harassment of the LGBT+ Workforce**

A TUC report in May 2019 outlined the shockingly high levels of sexual harassment and sexual assault faced by LGBT+ workers. Conference agreed that the National LGBT+ Committee should highlight the findings in the TUC report to ensure the impact of this is taken into account when campaigning and organising on this matter; produce guidance for branches and activists on protection from sexual harassment for LGBT+ members; work to campaign for the reintroduction of Section 40 of the Equality Act 2010 on 'third party protection'.

### **Ethical Procurement**

Conference applauds Unison's commitment to ensuring there is no slavery or human trafficking within any part of its business or supply chains. Continue to raise awareness of ethical procurement amongst LGBT+ members and work with the international section to raise awareness; encourage branches and SOGs to discuss ethical trading with LGBT+ organisations they work with, including Pride committees.

### **Palestine**

2019 commemorates the 52<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. HSBC is the main sponsor of Birmingham Pride but is a major contributor to supplying arms to the Israeli military. Conference instructed national LGBT+ Committee to work with the TUC to write to Birmingham Pride and drop HSBC as a sponsor and to urge LGBT+ trade unionists to support the campaign and to endorse the call from ASWAT (Palestinian LGBT group).

### **Forced Sterilisation In Exchange For Gender Recognition**

Conference was outraged that the rights of the Trans community remain under sustained attack around the world. It is still the case that in many countries there are laws in place which force Transgender people to be sterilised before changing their gender. Conference called on the national LGBT+ Committee to work with ILGA to identify viable actions to tackle forced sterilisation; support Japanese trade unions and Japanese LGBT+ charities to tackle the issue; and work with Unison's international unit to promote awareness of this issue.

### **LGBT+ Disability Activism in ILGA-Europe**

Unison was part of an ILGA-Europe gathering for D/Deaf and disabled LGBTI activists in Europe and Central Asia. National LGBT+ Committee will continue to support the work of the ILGA.

### **LGBT+ Ally Training**

LGBT+ people have a worse experience at work than people who identify as cis-gender and heterosexual. Conference committed to work with learning and organising services to develop our own LGBT+ Ally training and support programme.

### **Working To Protect The Human Rights of LGBT+ People Around The World**

There are still six countries in the world with the death penalty for being gay, 26 where you can get 10 years in prison, and 31 where you can get up to eight years imprisonment. Conference welcomed the Foreign and Commonwealth Office announcement that in June 2019 the UK had taken over as chair of the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC) jointly with Argentina until 2021. The aim of the ERC is to protect the human rights of LGBT+ people round the world. Conference urged the National LGBT+ committee to work with international TUC committees to campaign for the rights of LGBT+ people in countries of concern; support activists in these countries; and work with the TUC to continue to put pressure on the government and the opposition to raise concerns directly with leaders from these countries.

### **Brexit**

For disabled LGBT+ members, the prospect of a no deal exit from the European Union (EU), and the impacts as outlined in the “Yellowhammer” report, leaves us with a stark future. Conference agreed to continue to work with Labour Link to highlight our concerns, consult our disabled LGBT+ members to gain a picture of what is happening on the ground; encourage branches and regions to support our members from the EU working in the NHS, social care, and public sector organisations; support calls to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into UK law.

### **Gender Recognition Act Reform – A Lack of Progress**

Conference noted that the consultation by the Government on reform of the GRA (2004) closed on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2018 with little sign of any further progress. National LGBT+ Committee agreed to continue to support advances in transgender equality; monitor the actions taken by the UK Government and Scottish Parliament on any progress; update factsheets and organising guides to reflect changing arising from the consultations and associated parliamentary bills and acts.

### **Putting Politics Back in Pride and Wider LGBT+ Community**

In recent years it has been noted that events such as Pride have become less of a political protest and more of a corporate event sponsored by large companies. Conference agreed that the National LGBT+ Committee should encourage branches and regions to support local Pride events that align with Unison values; encourage Unison members/activists to stand for seats on local Pride committees and offer support; forge stronger links with Pride associations around the UK to increase trade union involvement; develop a presentation so regions and branches can highlight the history of Pride and the LGBT+ civil rights movement.

### **Domestic Abuse in LGBT+ Relationships**

Conference noted there was a postcode lottery of services that support victims of LGBT+ domestic abuse. Conference instructed the National LGBT+ Committee to work with the police and justice service groups to survey members working in probation to canvass the extent of this issue for our members; work with Labour Link to identify opportunities to lobby for inclusive countrywide domestic abuse services; continue to promote the work of Galop (the LGBT+ anti-violence charity).

### **Decriminalisation for Safety**

A lively debate took place on a proposal to push forward for the sex-worker industry to be decriminalised in order to protect the safety of those working in the industry. Conference believes that Unison should no longer call for the introduction of a “sex buyers’ law”. Also, conference resolves to seek a change in Unison policy on this matter through a motion to NDC in 2020.

### **No Outsiders (LGBT+ Education Rights)**

Conference noted the recent protests against the “No Outsiders” method of teaching young children about equality, in particular LGBT+ relationships, to encourage acceptance and an early age. We know that the earlier children are taught about acceptance the more likely they are to be open to understanding and recognising the differences within our diverse communities. Conference is opposed social media platforms often used to co-ordinate and propagate such protests and those who use schools and seek positions on governing bodies to impose their narrow and strict views in the classroom.

### **Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> November**

Hustings for election of delegates to 2020 NEC; selection of motions for 2020 NEC which voted for two motions: “Equal Pensions” and “Defending LGBT+ Inclusive Education”.

Guest speaker: Josie Bird, Unison President.

### **The LGBT+ Organising Awards were announced:**

Regional Award	South East Region
Caucus Award	Trans Caucus
Photography Award	Northwest Region at Crewe Pride

### **Debate on Motions**

#### **The Vatican Educational Paper On Gender Theory – A Confused Concept**

A debate took place on inclusive education in schools since the repeal of Section 28 and the release in June 2019 of a Vatican paper on gender theory in education “Male and Female He Created Them”. This is causing worldwide confusion and conference agreed to work with SOGs to create resources for schools covering issues around Trans equality that affect pupils and staff in schools; liaise with LGBT+ activists in teaching unions to coordinate campaigning against this paper and publicise e-sources which promote LGBT+ inclusive education.

#### **Access to Abortion**

Conference agreed to work with appropriate bodies to campaign for equal access for abortion in Northern Ireland; consider an article for Out in Unison; seeks to ensure any publications published are LGBT+ inclusive.

#### **Promoting Inclusion and Diversity in Sports**

This motion is close to my heart as a play for an all-inclusive rugby team in Chester who participates in the International Gay Rugby League. People continue to be exposed to homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic language and discrimination in all fields of sport. Conference agreed for the national LGBT+ Committee to work with local branches to link with local sports clubs to make them aware of the discrimination LGBT+ people may experience; encourage clubs to promote specific LGBT+ events such as Pride; encourage clubs to adopt a diversity and inclusion charter.

### **Supporting Older LGBT+ People**

National Committee to develop a set of national guidelines for supporting the needs of older LGBT+ people and develop a campaign to promote such guidelines; draw on the work already done by Unison Northern Ireland in taking these actions.

### **Make The Bi Network More Inclusive**

Conference noted and embraces the strides that Unison has taken in the establishment of a now thriving bi network within the union. Conference agreed to make the “+” more meaningful by changing the network name to “Bi+ Network”; work on publishing articles for “Out in Unison”; promote the Bi+ Network to all regional LGBT+ networks; urge all branches to encourage bi+ members to join the network.

### **Engaging Branches in LGBT+ Recruitment and Organising**

Conference agreed for the National LGBT+ Committee to work with regional LGBT+ SOGs to update references to our group to include the “+”; identify with branches best practice around recruitment and organising; encourage regional LGBT+ SOGs to work with other regional SOGs and service groups to build LGBT+ recruitment and bargaining into their own work plans.

### **BI Young Members**

The National LGBT+ Committee committed to liaising with the national young members’ forum to explore how we can best support each other; work collaboratively with the forum on literature; take a lead in demonstrating to branches and regions the importance of engaging with our young bi members.

### **Inclusive Language**

A debate on the use of exclusionary language within conference motions, such as “women and girls” without taking into consideration that these issues also affect our members who identify as Trans, under our inclusive umbrella term. Conference agreed that the National LGBT+ Committee should liaise with SOGs and service groups to raise awareness of this; provide clear guidance to SOGs and service groups why this issue is important to the Trans community; approach and attempt to engage in a dialogue with national women’s committee to seek support for inclusive language.

### **Celebrating Our LGBT+ Disabled Members’ Self Organisation and Diversity**

Conference agreed to ensure the work in respect of our caucuses highlight the need to address intersectionality and multiple discrimination including racism, disablism, sexism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia; promote our caucuses and national network days; promote the involvement of disabled Black, LGBT+, bisexual and transgender members in the LGBT+ members SOG.

### **Ensuring LGBT+ Representation in Apprenticeships**

Conference acknowledged the importance of it being pivotal that employers across all the industries and sectors aim to increase application and recruitment to apprenticeships from underrepresented groups including apprentices. Nation LGBT+ will publish the work of the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN); produce guidance on increasing application and recruitment to apprenticeships; share examples of best practice with regards to creating LGBT+ inclusive workplaces.

### **Celebrating and Supporting Regional Diversity**

Conference calls on national committee to conduct a review for publication at next year's conference, of the work taking place in the nations and regions to establish what support may be necessary to ensure that all Unison LGBT+ members enjoy the same rights and freedoms wherever they may live or work in the UK.

### **Beware That Share!**

Conference instructed the national committee to include guidance on using social media and how to avoid sharing posts and/or memes from far-right, alt-right and anti-LGBT+ groups and others, who do not share Unison's values and aims, in our anti-far right materials and guidance; create a simple Unison LGBT+ "Beware That Share!" meme or similar and develop a social media campaign to share across branches and regions; raise national member awareness; include social media in training events.

### **Back to Basics – The Decline of LGBT+ Rights**

Recent research by The Guardian highlighted the rise in homophobic and transphobic hate crime in England and Wales in the past year. Conference agreed that the National LGBT+ Committee should develop material to be used at workshops focussing on the basics of LGBT+ rights and to share and promote the workshop to branches, regions, and SOGs.

### **Why Are We Still Missing?**

It was argued that it was still currently possible for Unison's National Executive Council (NEC) to contain no members who identify as LGBT+. A debate for and against took place on whether there should be reserved seats on the NEC – conference opposed this motion and it failed.

### **Including Retired Members More Effectively At Self-Organised Group Conferences**

Conference recognised retired LGBT+ members taking part in conference debates would have been elected to do so by and from among LGBT+ retired members.

Conference instructed the National LGBT+ Committee to defend this principle in the future; relevant retired members gain right to submit items of business direct to respective SOG conference; further consultation with retired members on matters of detail and implementation.

### **Perfectly Good Motions Rules Out Of Order**

A number of motions were ruled out of order because they exceeded the 500 word limit. A debate for and against increasing the number of words in a motion took place – but conference voted against increasing this.

### **Unison Rule Book Benefits – Ex Members of NUPE in Same-Sex Relationships – Death of Spouse Benefit**

Conference wonders whether some ex-NUPE members with same-sex partners may not have claimed death of spouse benefit because they have taken the term "spouse", rightly or wrongly, to exclude their partner. Conference will seek clarification from the NEC on how Unison uses the term "spouse"; publicise death of spouse benefit, ask the retired members' national committee for help.

### **Including More Retired Members More Effectively at Self-Organised Group Conferences**

Conference wishes to see retired LGBT+ members submit their own items for business to this conference and their representatives to move them. Conference agreed relevant retired members should gain the right to submit items directly to SOG conferences; rule amendment to allow more than two retired members to each relevant SOG conference.

The closing ceremony was held at 1.30pm. It was a very useful and productive conference with a lot of issues agreed moving forward for the National LGBT+ Committee. It was also a great opportunity to catch up with old activist friends and to make new friends and contacts.

Two of my recommendations to Branch Committee will be to appoint a specific LGBT+ representative on the committee and to set up a branch LBGT+ SOG.

If you would like any further information on what was discussed at conference please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

Gareth Dudley  
Branch Equalities Officer