



REMEMBERING **SEAN McGOVERN**

by his family, friends and comrades



**A TRADE UNION CHAMPION
FOR DISABLED PEOPLE**



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Sean McGovern

A Trade Union Champion For Disabled People

FOREWORD BY JIM MOWATT

The main tutorial room in the Unite National Education Centre in Birmingham is dedicated to Sean McGovern – that alone is testament to the high regard (and affection) with which our Union's members held Sean McGovern. And Sean was not, as you will discover in this excellent account of Sean's life, only a great trade unionist, he was additionally a very successful campaigner for disabled peoples' rights and a formidable political operator.

Perhaps Sean's most significant contribution was his ability to integrate different strands into coherent campaigning; and to do all that with integrity and courage.

Mark Metcalf brings to life the contrasting fortunes which impacted on Sean and the triumphs which Sean achieved.

As with other women and men about whom we have written in this series of Unite booklets, Sean McGovern was a very effective leader; by definition he had tons of followers – I was one of them! You'll hear from other followers from a wide variety of organisations in this booklet. Such was the variety of activities, organisations campaign groups and individuals that he genuinely supported that the cover of this booklet ought to be a modernised version of a Pieter Bruegel the Elder landscape as there was so much going on simultaneously in Sean's colourful life. For not only was Sean very well read (donating his extensive library to the union), he was a dedicated follower of fashion from his expensive footwear to his scarves and headgear.

As Sean McGovern (1957-2020) was a unique character it is entirely appropriate that this first ever booklet on a disabled trade unionist is about him. This work follows a very simple format in that it consists of Sean's own words accompanied by interviews with some of his family and great friends.

Thank you and congratulations to the author, Mark Metcalf, for crafting this booklet and bringing Sean to the attention of the next generation of activists. Sean is an inspiration.

In solidarity



Jim Mowatt
Unite the union

Many thanks to the following for making this booklet possible: David Allan, Ellen Clifford, Marsha De Cordova, Siobhan Endean, Claire Glasman, Maureen Goss, Mark Harvey, Diana Holland, Jim Kelly, Collette McGovern, Jim Mowatt, Frances O'Grady, Paula Peters, Doug Pouch, Aimee Quirke, Quinn Roache, Christine Stuart and Mark Thomas.



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A TRADE UNION CHAMPION FOR DISABLED PEOPLE



PART 1: Sean's sisters Maureen, Christine and Collette

Maureen Goss

IRISH PARENTS

I am the oldest sister in the family, born 1955. My parents were Irish immigrants and they rented rooms and shared a bathroom and toilet in a house of multiple occupancy in Seven Sisters, Holloway in North London.

Sean was born on January 27th 1957. When Mum was expecting her third child, Christine, born December 1957, the council allocated my parents a two-bedroom council flat in Kennington. We moved south across the Thames and Angela was born there in 1959.

Dad and Sean contracted tuberculosis during this period and as part of attempts to stop the spread of the disease they were sent to separate isolation centres.

When Collette was born in July 1962 we were massively overcrowded. With very few large houses available locally we were pleased to be offered a brand new four-bedroomed council house in Stockwell, South London. We moved there in November 1964. Sean experienced some health problems and suffered from asthma, which may have been caused by the London environment as there were large amounts of fossil fuels being burned.

Sean attended a local Catholic primary school, St Anne's, before transferring aged 11 to St Gerard's Boys Catholic Secondary School opposite Clapham Common. He was very good at some subjects and really enjoyed English Language, History and English Literature. He achieved seven 'O' levels. Today, he would go on to do 'A' levels and then attend university. At school he loved swimming.

At 14 he began weekend working at a carpet shop in East Street market. On leaving school he worked there full-time.

He struggled as the only boy in a family with four sisters. Sean and I were like chalk and cheese. When I began working at the age of 16 our lives became very separate. There were some issues that did not concern me which Sean was very passionate about, including British troops in Northern Ireland. When the IRA started bombing London, which put everyone in danger, my dad and Sean would have major complex arguments.

He would go out a lot, mainly with his next-door friend Michael Smedley. They listened to many bands and Sean occasionally went to see Chelsea, who he supported all his life. He watched the 1970 FA Cup final matches against Leeds United and his favourite all-time player was Eden Hazard.

I left home in 1976, got married and moved permanently to St Albans.

OPPORTUNITIES RESTRICTED FOLLOWING A BAD ATTACK

Sean had, for no reason, been badly attacked. He needed rehabilitation and it was a very difficult time as he had a plate fitted in his head and could not walk or talk properly. He had to re-learn everything and this took a long time and involved considerable effort.

He had a pronounced limp and it left him very angry. While he still went out, he would drink heavily and act recklessly. If something happens in your teenage, formative years then it has a big effect on your personality.

He thought his choices in life were limited. I look back and realise now that my parents had a lot of children to look after but were ill-equipped to help Sean who was now a very challenging person. My parents needed professional help but it was not available.

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When Sean was about 20 he came to live for a year close by at Garstang, Watford, and he did some rehabilitation which showed him life skills to enable him to look for work. He would visit some weekends and it was good for him. He was set to do carpentry as an occupation. He met a few people with whom he became good friends. Trevor was one and they kept in touch for years.

FINDING WORK

He later began working with Michael Smedley at a joinery shop in Camberwell but it proved to be too physical and he would get very frustrated when things went wrong.

He went to South Bank University on Wandsworth Road between 1990 and 1993 to do a building construction course. He hoped to become a surveyor. When he realised that he would need to be very mobile in order to go on to building sites he started to think he could not do it properly. He saw his life being limited by the attack. He would then start to think there were not equal opportunities and that those with disabilities had fewer choices.

It is what led to him starting to work for Remploy and he later became a TGWU shop steward. Sean did not talk about this too much. He just said they were doing marches and things like that. My sister Angela saw him more and she would say he was doing many activities.

I saw him on the regional and national news once or twice. Angela would let us know and then I would ring him and say I had seen him on the TV. I was proud of him as he was putting his money where his mouth was.

I did not always agree with his strong opinions but I prefer people who have some. I do appreciate that not everyone can sit in the background, not saying anything. Yes, some have to put their head above the parapet.

I did not comprehend how involved he was, how ground-breaking he was. He started off a lot of things at grassroots by pushing disability rights within employment structures.

After he died, I went out looking at things and saw his name mentioned many times. I looked at his blog as I did not know what he was doing. It is bittersweet, he has left a mark and rightly got a name for doing things that left improvements.

Clearly his angst and anger were channeled into something worthwhile. He became more melancholy in later life; he would previously get very worked up and waste a lot of energy.

GOOD WRITER

I think his writing was very good and it is a shame he did not go into some sort of journalism. He could express himself but in the 1960s and 70s and you were working class it was not a career many people would have considered.

As a shop steward he had to do a lot of writing. He loved reading and writing, literature and poetry. He had a very sensitive side and he empathised with those that did not follow a path – such as Amy Winehouse. Some friends would say they liked the music but she was a druggie. Sean would say that she was very troubled and it came out in her writing and made her a great singer. He did not condemn people unless they were political opponents.

Christine Stuart

SEAN WAS WITH MAM THE DAY BEFORE SHE DIED

Sean saw Mam, who was staying at my house in Kent, the day before she died. Because of the Covid restrictions he was reluctant to visit but we both knew that she was poorly and so he made the trip from London. I am glad he did. He was quite together on the day. He was glad to have seen Mum.

Sean was not present the day she died. I spoke to him about 9pm and he was in mellow mood and said he was going to have a drink for Mum. He was fine.

Sean would regularly come down for lunch. He liked the drive out to the country, have lunch, chat and then drive back again.

I would worry he would think he was being left behind. I did a lot of family gatherings and he would come to all of them. I think he was lonely. He had lots of friends but no one close.

He was a very bright person but he did not apply himself at school. If he had then he could have gone far.

A gratuitous violent attack on Sean proved to be the defining moment of his life. I remember it clearly; it still affects me. If that had not happened, he may not be dead today. I feel it contributed to his early death as over the years his health suffered as his mobility steadily got worse.

Sean would not tell you when things were happening, other people told you. I am very proud of him; I know more about him since he died. He was very modest but he should have told us more. It was amazing the people he was photographed with.

My brother got on well with my daughter and the three small dogs we have and he loved our garden. He liked his nice things and he would ring me when he had bought something special and describe it.

SHOPPING

He liked shopping, especially for clothes and furniture. He liked good watches. So do I. Years ago when I visited America, he wanted some shoes that could not be bought here and he gave me the size and colour. My husband said "Never again." We walked everywhere. They were the rarest of things, it took up the holiday, it became an obsession. I finally got them.

Sean was a good listener, forget the politics. You could ring him in the middle of a family feud and you could offload and he would give his opinion but he would keep the conversation to himself. I felt especially bad when my other sister Angela was so unwell as we did not know how to help her. She was an alcoholic and she became very ill and died.

Collette McGovern

In addition to what Maureen has said I would like to add the following. Sean was just six months old when he was put into quarantine because of tuberculosis. Mum, who was expecting with Christine, took him in a birthday cake a month before his first birthday.

He always got on best with Angela. As he was five years older than me, he was responsible for bringing me home safely from school.

MUM AND DAD

Our mum, known as Delia, was very practical and fantastic at managing money. As well as bringing up five children she worked part-time in jobs such as early-morning cleaning that fitted in around school hours. She had a strong work ethic and the money she earned helped pay for the deposit to later buy our council house. Mum was great friends with a local neighbour who often looked after us.

Our dad, John, worked as a London Transport engineer. He was well-read and particularly enjoyed doing crosswords. Sean was named after Dad, his official name being John William. It is common in Irish families to have a christening name but also to use a different name in everyday life. Mum was officially Bridget Agnes.

In Sean's teenage years it was a time of skinheads and ska music whereas Sean and his friends were more into the bands that played at the Woodstock Festival, first held in 1969, such as the Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan. He wanted to stay on at school but the mindset of my parents meant this was not an option as he was expected to find a job and contribute to the family income at the age of 15. Maureen has mentioned Michael Smedley. Their friendship ended when Michael became a staunch Conservative in his 20s.

A promising life taken away by mindless violence.

It was November 1973 when, as they got off a bus, Sean and his friends were attacked by a gang of young men who dressed very differently from them. They were maybe not skinheads but they had that sort of look. He sustained a head injury from one of the attacking group when he was on the ground.

He was badly beaten up and he came home and went straight to bed. We had no house phone. At 4am

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he woke up and started screaming as he could not see. The next-door neighbour phoned for an ambulance which took him to St Thomas' hospital, I was told by my eldest sister that he had broken his leg. She was protecting me.

He was later transferred to a Maida Vale hospital that specialised in neurological treatment and he was put into an induced coma for 13 days. Here was a young man aged 15 with a promising life which had been taken away by mindless violence.

The police found Sean's attacker who was 16. His friends had halted the attack on Sean saying they just "sort of wanted a tussle". Sean's assailant had taken it to extremes by jumping on his head on the floor. There was no prosecution and Sean was left to battle on without expert support.

Everything that Sean did for the rest of his life was shaped by this attack. I think he felt a lesser person and he did not think he deserved what had happened. It was not dealt with very well. My parents needed support but it did not exist. I think Sean felt a degree of abandonment by our parents. He never had a good relationship with Dad but as he got older, especially after he found a positive role at Remploy, he rebuilt his relationship with Mum and they were very close at the end. The night before he died, he used social media and messenger to contact family and friends in Ireland and Australia to let them know that Mum had just died.

Towards the end of her life, I looked after Mum as she wanted to stay in her own home. She was forgetful and had lost the ability to cook but she was never diagnosed with Alzheimer's. My eldest daughter was also living with us.

Between 1979 and 1989, Sean was not working much. He did lots of reading whilst living at home and it meant that he was excellent at articulating himself. He did not know that then. He would get very depressed and he was drinking heavily and self-harming. My dad, who died in 1994, could not deal with this. It was not how men handled things; they were just told to pull yourself together. I am not sure if Sean sought any medical help.

Sean, who by then was in a wheelchair, began permanently living independently in 1999 when he moved to a ground floor flat on the Stockwell estate where I was living. He had a care package and a mobility vehicle in which his carer drove him to work. We spoke regularly. He later moved to a fully accessible Brixton flat.

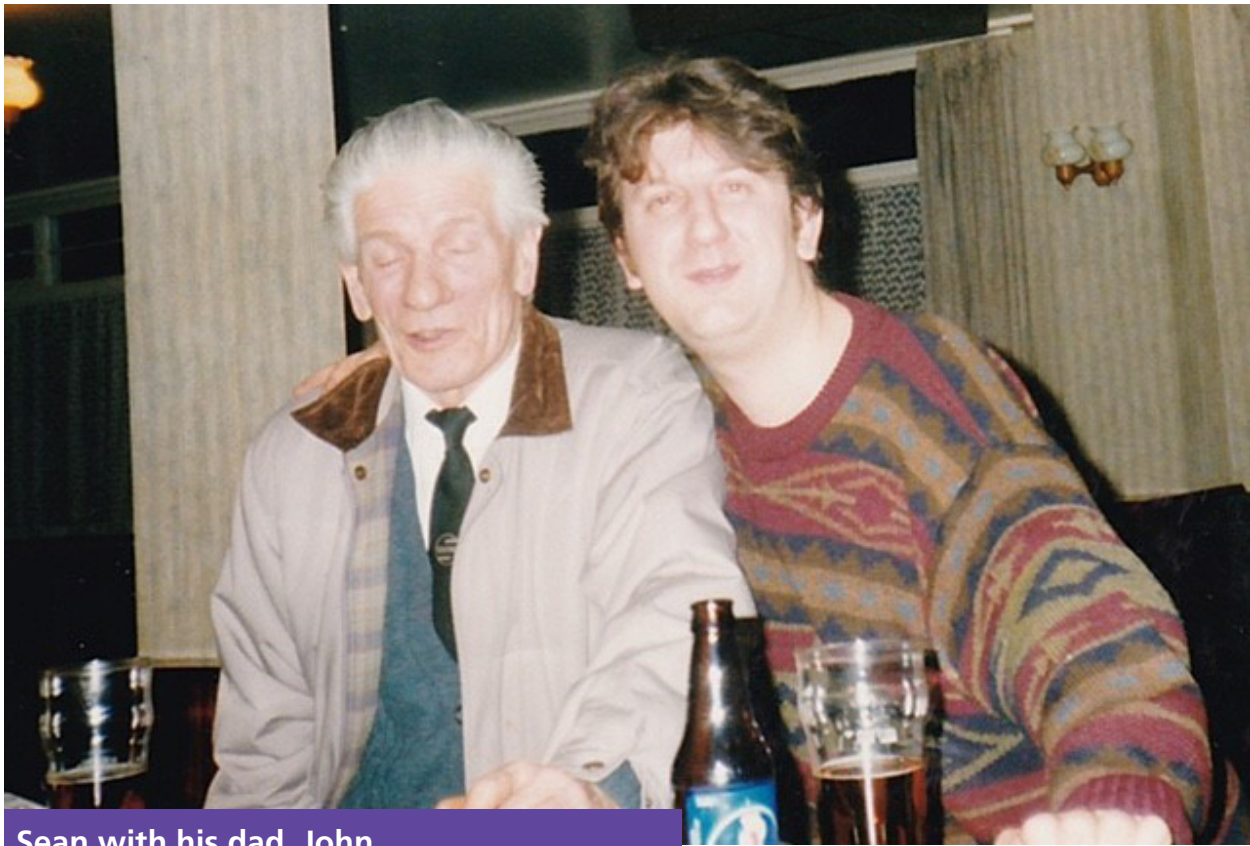
When he was made redundant from Remploy it took a while for Sean to find other work. This was ironic because he was great at signposting others into work but sorting out his own employment was often tricky.

It is a great shame that Sean did not realise much earlier how useful he was and good at what he did. It took him a long time to understand his value.

LEGACY

He has written a lot of words and it means his views will be expressed and not just interpreted.

He has therefore left a legacy for people and it will help. But I am very, very sad. If only . . . it remains a personal tragedy and he has died much too young.



Sean with his dad, John



Delia McGovern, brought up 5 children and worked part-time in jobs such as early-morning cleaning.

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Sean with his sister Angela at her wedding



Maureen Goss and Christine, two of Sean's sisters

PART 2: Trade Unionism

Diana Holland, OBE

Unite assistant general secretary for transport, food and agriculture sectors and equalities; elected Labour Party treasurer



I first met Sean McGoven after he was elected as a TGWU workplace representative at Remploy in the mid-1990s and became active in the regional disabled members' structure for London, South East and Anglia region. (TGWU region 1)

Sean became frustrated with what he felt was the slow rate of progress by the union in adopting policies and practices that would enable disabled people to play a fuller part in the TGWU. This saw him clash with the regional officer for disabled people, Maureen Byrne. Sean was often viewed as a little bit of an outsider and when he stood for positions such as a committee chair, he was unsuccessful.

DISABILITY FORUM ESTABLISHED

Change, though, was afoot. At the 1993 biennial delegates' conference a resolution was passed that gave the green light to set up a disability forum. I helped establish forums both regionally and nationally. Although they had no status or power, the

bringing together of activists was certain to result in further demands by disabled people for their rights to be strengthened across society and within the TGWU. Although it took some time, this is what happened.

The region 1 chair was Lenny Hine, a jazz player with a big personality who had become quite severely disabled after a workplace accident. Len's partner Sue later became the chairperson of the national disability structure.

In 1995 the Disability Discrimination Act became law. It meant we were not just using the earlier Disabled Persons Acts of 1944 and 1958 which were centred on disabled ex-servicemen. In the years around 1995 there was the "Rights Now" campaign, which the TGWU backed and in which Sean was involved. It grew in strength as disabled people took to the streets about their lack of rights.

Sean was also involved in establishing, and subsequently building, the trade union disability alliance. Sean always supported the union industrially and wanted this aligned with a big role in the disability movement. This meant that although he later became elected to some senior positions, he never lost that fighting grassroots spirit.

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TIMELINE OF TRANSPORT AND GENERAL WORKERS UNION/UNITE DISABILITY STRUCTURES

TRANSPORT & GENERAL WORKERS UNION

NATIONAL DISABILITY FORUM

Inaugural meeting November 1993

Two meetings a year 1993-5; three meetings a year 1996-1999

NATIONAL DISABLED MEMBERS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Inaugural meeting January 2000

NATIONAL DISABLED MEMBERS COMMITTEE

Inaugural meeting January 2005

The following members chaired the forum, advisory and members committee during this period:-

John Tomlinson

Paul Smith

Sue Hine

Brian Blatchford

In the TGWU we had combined meetings of the chairs and vice-chairs from all the equality committees to look at overarching issues and how to support one another. Sean was always keen to make sure that all disabled members were included. If there were issues about disabled women or black disabled members then he would back supportive activities.

Everything in the T&G that Sean did was from the region. There was just one delegate per region nationally at that time.

UNITE T&G SECTION

NATIONAL DISABLED MEMBERS' COMMITTEE

2008-2009

When the new union was being formed from the merger between the TGWU and Amicus there was a concern that it might mean the loss of the TGWU improvements to ensure disabled people were represented across all sections of the union. The Amicus structures were much weaker and so we got together and proposed a full disabled members' committee which is what we got in the new union. We got backing from Amicus disabled activists such as Dave Allan, who in 2021 is chair of the Unite disabled members' committee.

UNITE THE UNION

NATIONAL DISABLED MEMBERS' COMMITTEE

Inaugural meeting November 2009

Sean was first elected nationally to the Unite national disabled members' committee as part of a larger delegation from the London & Eastern region. At that meeting, he had the great honour, demonstrating the high regard in which he was held nationally, in being elected chair of the NDMC at the first Unite NDMC meeting, the only nominee from the former T&G.

UNITE CHAIR

Sean McGovern was chair throughout Unite the union 2009-2020 and he was also the Unite executive council's disabled members' representative from 2009 to 2020 – a position elected by the whole membership.

Dave Allan, former vice-chair (and previously joint vice-chair with Lesley McCallum), is now the elected chair.

5th November 2009



Unite the Union
National Disabled Members' Committee
Unite House, 128 Theobalds Road, Holborn, London

Minutes of First Meeting

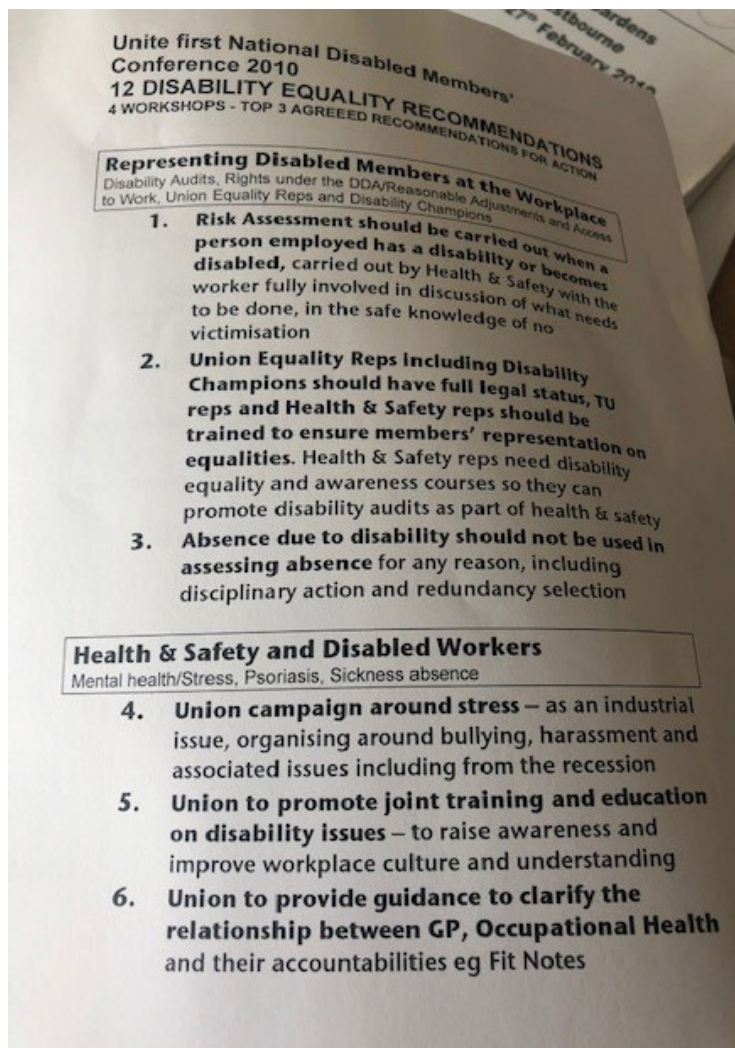
1. Welcome and examination of credentials
2. Announcements and apologies for absence
3. Election of Chair
4. Election of Vice-Chair
5. Adoption of Standing Orders
6. First Unite Regional Disabled Members' Conferences and Committees 2009 and first Unite National Disabled Members' Conference and Committees 2010
7. Disability equality – report and update
8. Promoting Disability Equality
9. TUC Disabled Members' Conference 2010
10. Labour Party Disabled Members' Group
11. Disabled Workers Internationally

Unite's first meeting of the National Disabled Members' Committee in November 2009

This image is of the key issues raised from the meeting as remits (motions) from this first committee meeting for the attention of the Executive Council. They very much reflect Sean's approach and commitment and were agreed unanimously by the committee.

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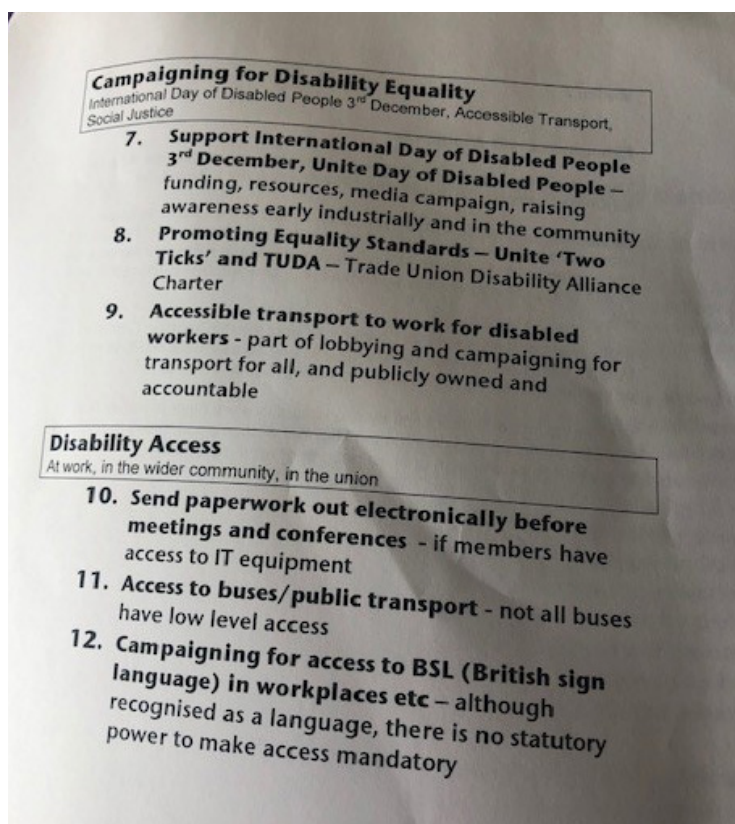
The first Unite National Disabled Members Conference 2010, chaired by Sean McGovern, included both motions and workshops.

The motions were put forward by Regional Disabled Members Committees and voted on at Conference.

Alongside the motions, as part of maximising involvement and building the new union, the conference also divided up into workshops on 4 key areas set by the NDMC.

These are the top 3 priorities for action on each key area, which were also included in the NDMC discussions following conference.

The workshops also ensured the voices of the diversity of Unite disabled members were fully included. Sean always made sure everyone participated.



NATIONAL OFFICER RESPONSIBILITY FOR DISABILITY IN T&G AND UNITE

The national officer responsible for the first national disability forum meeting in 1993 was Bob Purkiss, and the initial forum was closely linked to Unite's Remploy membership in a number of regions (but not all) at this time. The structure moved following this to be inclusive of all disabled members.

Following this first meeting, T&G responsibility for disabled issues rested with myself as the national secretary, then national organiser and then assistant general secretary. That remained the case throughout the T&G section of Unite 2008-9; and into the first meetings in Unite 2009-2010.

Following this, first Collette Cork-Hurst was national officer for disabled members in Unite, then Siobhan Endean, and now it is Harish Patel.

Other senior positions held by Sean McGovern:

Sean was nominated as the Unite rep on the TUC disabled workers' committee and he was then elected chair. He represented Unite on the TUC general council.

Disability officer for the London Labour Party. Sean was the first disabled member on the Labour Party NEC.

He was first elected nationally to the Unite national disabled members committee (NDMC) as part of a larger delegation from London & Eastern region. He had the great honour of being elected chair of the NDMC at its first meeting, the only nominee from the former T&G. This demonstrated the high regard in which he was held nationally.

Key issues were raised from the first committee meeting as remits (motions) for the attention of the executive council. They very much reflect Sean's approach and commitment and were agreed unanimously by the committee.

REMPLOY

Sean, of course, was central to the campaign, which included strike action in 2012, to save the government-run Remploy factories that employed people with disabilities.

Ministers argued the plants were loss-making and money could be better spent ending segregated employment and helping individuals find jobs elsewhere alongside able-bodied workers.

As a union, we agreed with Sean that disabled people needed a range of supportive measures to help them find and retain jobs. Yes, there should be strengthened anti-discrimination laws and a quota system. Public funds should be available to help ensure disabled people are supported to work alongside able-bodied workers. When it becomes clear that more disabled people are being employed then the quota system can disappear. We want disabled people to be employed everywhere. That time is still some way off.

But, as a union, we also backed our Remploy members who unanimously wanted to keep the factories open and their jobs safe. Articles from Sean's blog that are reproduced elsewhere in this booklet offer a longer explanation as to why but we argued that Remploy employed workers with a whole range of complex mental and physical constraints which made it hard for them to be employed elsewhere. People had arranged their whole lives around working at Remploy and at other supported employment workplaces.

ALTERNATIVE BUSINESS PLAN NEEDED

The trade unions said the factories need an alternative business plan and closing them would make many vulnerable people permanently unemployed, which is, in fact, what happened.

Sean was a tremendous advocate for Remploy workers. Whilst he was a powerful advocate for integrated employment, he also knew the desperate reality for many disabled people seeking work, especially in manual occupations.

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REMPLOY in Manchester
Photo credit: Mark Harvey

BRINGING THE DISABILITY MOVEMENT INTO THE HEART OF TRADE UNIONS

Like many people, I really liked Sean and he is massively missed. We had a difficult start as he saw me as a union bureaucrat and he was an activist. As we worked together fighting for disabled people's rights, which saw him bring the disability movement into the heart of the trade unions, we developed a common approach in which he grew in stature and became a real leader. He became a really caring, compassionate person. He was also liked by people as he had a fantastic sense of humour and was capable of having a laugh.

Sean was a tireless champion for disabled people, and he ensured that their particular interests were never overlooked in any of our debates. He was always well-briefed and everyone, from government ministers down, knew from experience how persistent he could be in championing the rights of disabled workers. He was very motivated by the great things about trade unions; that you can change things now, as well as being part of the wider movement.

Sean, of course, was a socialist and he wanted a fundamental change to how society was organised. He did not restrict his vision and he backed the struggles of workers in all parts of the world.

Siobhan Endean

Unite national officer for equalities

Sean McGovern was a lead union rep in Remploy and later at the Disability Advice Service in Lambeth. He was a professionally-trained advice worker who supported disabled people seeking to claim direct payments and he fought hard to ensure that his union, Unite, would lead in campaigning for equality and justice for disabled people.

CAMPAGNING AGENDA BORN OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Sean's campaigning agenda was born of personal experience and a recognition of the structural discrimination that disabled people face every day. His focus was very much on the fight for dignity and

justice for disabled people whether it was the fight against hate crime; the detested work capability assessments; the fight for independent living for disabled people and the need for a social security system fit for purpose; or the need to deliver access to work for disabled people. Sean was a tireless campaigner. He was dedicated to providing a collective voice to address the cumulative impact of austerity on disabled people from 2010 onwards.

As a recipient of the independent living fund, he was at the forefront of the campaign to keep it when the government ended it to new applicants. He was never ever confident that universal credit would mean anything other than a cut in income for disabled people. He was instrumental in ensuring the union movement and eventually the Labour Party developed the position to scrap and replace universal credit with social security payments that would tackle the poverty and injustice endured by many disabled people.

Sean understood the importance of direct action, and had no hesitation in stopping traffic, he also knew we needed to influence decision-making, and spoke truth to power with an evidence-based case for change.

He recognised the division that the Conservative government was creating by their vilification of disabled people in the mainstream media and concentrated his efforts in winning over the hearts and minds of working people, to inspire them to join with us in the campaign for dignity and justice for disabled people.

FIRST DIRECTLY ELECTED DISABLED MEMBER

With the full support of his region and the national disabled members' committee, Sean was the first directly-elected disabled member to represent disabled members on the Unite executive committee. Sean was also elected to represent Unite on the TUC general council. It was a platform for Sean to provide a voice for disabled workers.

He ensured that the union worked with disabled people in our communities, and he built strong alliances with activists in the campaigning body, the Disabled People Against Cuts, and he chaired Lambeth's pan disability forum. He had a deep suspicion of charities who claimed to represent disabled people. He stood by the principle of 'nothing about us without us'.

ADDRESSING THE 2011 MARCH

It was an important moment when he addressed the 2011 TUC March for an Alternative. He reported that every day disabled people were dying due to austerity and he called for action to defend disabled people and to defend our class.

Sean was an organiser at heart. He understood the potential of a strong network of disabled union reps and community activists working together to challenge the deep austerity cuts that impacted on disabled people. Sean was incredibly inclusive and rarely came to a meeting on his own as he was constantly empowering people to get involved. Sean very much encouraged Marsha De Cordova to become active as a Unite rep and then to become a Labour councillor and later an MP and shadow minister for equalities.

SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

He was strategic in making our union more accessible to disabled people. He educated our union on the social model of disability; he was persistent in ensuring access audits were a regular feature of union administration and always followed up to ensure changes needed were acted upon.

CHANGING UNION CULTURE

Sean was determined to change union culture, and to encourage all activists in the union to include social networking with disabled people. It was not just about the physical barriers faced by disabled people but also the political ones. He was acutely aware that political struggles within trade unions could revolve around building a social network that often developed through who you went to the pub with. So, if you were a disabled activist and could not get into the pub then this was a problem that he knew needed highlighting. The other really conscious thing for Sean was the need to put himself in a position where he could expose those barriers, to demonstrate just how bad it was, and what needed to change to make venues more accessible. Sean could often be found picketing a meeting or an event out of necessity.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

One of the things he did within the Unite national disabled members' committee was to produce guidance and try to change culture within the organisation. We issued to all officers, staff and union activists the nuts and bolts of how you make meetings more inclusive. He was acutely aware of the need to give confidence to all Unite members to understand that we are all part of the social model of disability. That went a long way to giving people understanding and solutions that meant they were not scared of addressing disability access issues.

LOVED

It is Sean's lasting legacy that he won the hearts and minds of so many to equality for disabled people. Sean was good fun, irreverent, incredibly intelligent, sensitive, a gentle comrade. He was a firm friend and ally to many activists and was loved by friends and family. If he had any advice to offer activists it would be to respect your energy levels, and reach out to friends and colleagues if you are struggling. Don't let activism become exhausting. In the main, Sean followed these principles and it served him well. Occasionally he got tired, and he also knew how to switch off, find joy in music, literature and art.

He led a life well lived. We miss him every day.

David Allan

Represents disabled members on the Unite executive council

It was at a Trades Union Congress (TUC) disabled workers' conference that I first met Sean McGovern over 20 years ago. I got to know him better in the lead-up to the amalgamation in 2007 between Amicus, of which I was a member and chair of the disabled members' committee, and the TGWU, where Sean was a member of the national disabled members' committee. We worked closely together up until his death.

I was aware that he'd become a trade union activist through his work at Remploy, the existence of which became a major political debate centered on whether disabled workers should be amalgamated into the general workforce rather than working in sheltered employment. Remploy workers became victims.

I knew Sean was involved in direct disability action, mainly in the London area. I live in the North East of England and was more based in the trade union and labour movement.

But then the disability agenda started to become much more central to activities within Unite. There were all sorts of campaigns around issues such as Universal Credit (UC) and the Independent Living Fund (ILF) which had direct relationships to our members.

We debated those issues and worked closely together. It was basically Sean and I, supported by Disabled People Against the Cuts (DPAC) who drove Unite's opposition to UC as initially Unite and TUC both thought it could be fixed. Our position was "stop and scrap" and we moved that through the Unite disabled members committee, the Unite policy conference, the TUC disabled workers' conference and finally it arrived at the TUC national conference.

I moved the motion and Sean seconded. We got support. It was agreed unanimously and it became TUC agreed policy. It was embedded and it meant no longer saying pause and fix but stop and scrap UC.

WORKING WITH DEBBIE ABRAHAMS, THE SHADOW SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS

At same time, Sean, myself and other colleagues were working with people like Ellen Clifford and Tracy Lazard from Inclusion London and with the senior membership of the Labour Party front bench, especially Debbie Abrahams, the shadow secretary of state for work and pensions, who was excellent.

We set up the disability equality roadshow which we took right around the country so that disabled people and their organisations could feed in their ideas. This resulted in the really excellent Labour Party 2017 general election manifesto including a sub manifesto called Nothing About You Without You. (*) This is a play on the words of the disabled mantra of nothing about us without us.

VISION

Labour promised that if elected they would scrap UC on day one. The whole process raised the vision amongst disabled people in that they were finally going to be on the pathway to be fully integrated into society and the workplace. That vision was cruelly shattered by what I would contend was sabotage by people working within the Labour Party who were determined to ensure Jeremy Corbyn would not win the election.

The result has been ongoing attacks on disabled people by the Tory government.

Our rights in society and in the workplace have all nosedived massively since 2010, as has financial support for independent living.

Disabled people demand that when things are being discussed about us then we must be at the heart of those proceedings.

We believe that professional well-meaning disabled charities workers who think they know what is best for us is indeed not best for us. We live the lives of disabled people and we know what we need to live independently within society including at workplaces.

These well-meaning, disability charities can be very bad employers. Sean and I talked about how at Remploy there were very few managers at senior level who had impairments. Those that did tended to have lower-paid jobs. Managers were generally non-disabled professionals.

One of the final things we were working on together was to try to ensure that a future Labour government would fully implement the "UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities".

We had a meeting with Keir Starmer. I was representing Unite and there were several disabled persons' organisations present. Keir Starmer pledged that a future Labour government would embed the UN convention into UK law immediately. More importantly, the Labour Party at present would campaign in Parliament to try to force the Conservative government to do the same. I am convinced that Sean was central to this commitment by Keir Starmer and Labour.

UNIQUE BRIDGE BUILDER

Sean McGovern was unique in being able to bridge the gap between trade unions, the disabled people's movement and the Labour Party, I don't think there was anyone who could do that in the way Sean McGovern did.

How did he do this? I just think he had the ability to engage with people. He could identify what the major issues were and he knew how to build alliances to progress them. They might be issues that did not immediately appear to be reconcilable between the three groupings mentioned. But he would somehow find a way to relate between the three. He was unique and irreplaceable.

In 2020 I had not seen Sean in person for a few months, because of Covid-19, but I was in regular contact via telephone and on zoom when we had committee meetings.

Over the years where we worked together, he became a close friend, I absolutely miss him terribly and I often think "I wonder what Sean thinks" and I go to phone him. I felt I could ring him at any time.

MILLIONS SPENT BY UNITE ON MAKING BUILDINGS ACCESSIBLE

Unite, of course, has spent millions on making the fabrics of its buildings accessible for members with impairments. It is not perfect but they have gone a long way thanks to Sean McGovern pushing for these changes.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades



David Allan

Photo Credit: Mark Thomas

In 2021, Dave Allan won the Unite executive council seat for disabled members. Dave expressed his thanks to United Left members who campaigned for his election, and saluted the late Sean McGovern whose campaigning efforts resulted in the original establishment of the seat.

Frances O'Grady *General secretary, TUC*

I am privileged to have known and worked with Sean for many years. He was a committed trade unionist, a great comrade and a thoroughly decent man. A passionate, principled champion of disabled people at work and in society, Sean had a huge impact within the trade union movement and far beyond.

For almost a decade, Sean led the TUC general council's work on disability with dignity and determination. And he did so at a profoundly difficult time for disabled people, as cruel Tory austerity policies hit jobs, services and lifelines hard. Throughout, Sean went the extra mile to give disabled workers a strong collective voice, always seeking to defend and advance disabled workers' and working people's rights.

CAMPAIGNER

Sean was a formidable campaigner and organiser. As co-chair of the TUC's disabled workers' committee and a major figure in Unite, Sean ensured disability issues were always prominent on the trade union agenda. And through his work with the Labour Party, Sean had the political nous not just to win arguments – but win change.

Always well-briefed, Sean was a brilliant advocate for disabled workers. His own experience of injustice and unfairness inspired him to fight for others with selfless dedication. Year after year, Sean devoted his life to disabled people – and his unique contribution will never be forgotten.

LEGACY

Sean's legacy was immense – and it lives on in our movement's continuing struggle for justice and equality for disabled people. The best memorial to Sean is to keep the flame burning for the causes he did so much to advance.



Frances O'Grady
Photo Credit: Mark Thomas



**Sean speaking at the TUC March and Rally in November 2013,
representing Unite the union executive and TUC General Council**
Photo Credit: Mark Thomas

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

Quinn Roache

Policy officer in the TUC's equalities and strategy department, focusing on LGBT+ and disabled workers

My job consists of two parts. One is to work with our equality committees, like the disabled workers' committee and LGBT+ committee. I bring them together in order that they can exercise their function which is to organise a conference that focuses on the most pressing issues for that strand of work and from that to take one motion to national congress, which is our biggest democratic event, to become TUC policy.

Part two is everyday policy focusing on disabled or LGBT+ workers – what is the evidence that shows what issues are affecting disabled workers, how can we address them, how can we bring together our constituent unions to come up with a solution or what guidance might help these unions and how can I produce it? What campaigns do we need to try to tackle the issues and how can we run them?

Both parts are closely linked as I don't do the policy parts without discussing it with the relevant committee, which is an advisory group and so I seek their advice on the policy side and involve them in different ways.

I support the committee and I give different levels of support to the chairs and co-chairs of the committees. Sean was a chair and so I worked with him more than the rest of the committee.

I knew of him, because of my previous work in the equalities field, but had not met him before I began working at the TUC in 2017. I had gained the impression that he seemed switched on to the issues.

HELPFUL

Sean was really helpful when I first started and provided me with some good advice. I thought he was very kind and gentle and he had a way of giving me a gentle steer to help me to understand what was going on. I always appreciated that.

At disabled workers' conferences Sean and I would focus on the disability pay gap. At TUC rallies or parliamentary events, he was very focused on ending universal credit (UC) and he was a driving force behind the TUC adopting a policy of stop and scrap UC.

He was a political operator through his own union and he helped to ensure things happened at conference. It was his Unite motion that went to my initial disabled workers' TUC conference that affirmed the position of ending UC.

The following year he was instrumental in getting passed a motion which was about the national independent living support service. I saw his driving force in getting that through the disabled workers' conference and eventually turning it into TUC policy.

But it was never just about adopting a new policy as he was always thinking ahead. If we are saying stop and scrap UC then how can we make this a reality? One of the events we ran looked at what should replace UC. He spearheaded this by organising a parliamentary event that brought together disabled workers' organisations and disabled people.

WELL-CONNECTED

It is really important to reflect on how well-connected he was within the trade union movement and disabled people's organisations. He was very genuine and helpful and he helped guide people. I also think he was a gentle man. I felt very lucky to have him as my chair when I started this role and I was fortunate enough to be able to draw on him for his advice and he was unstoppable in seeking to improve the lives of disabled people.

Jim Kelly

Chair of Unite London & Eastern region

It was around 2002 when I first met Sean in the TGWU broad left (BL) in region 1, when several regional activists began campaigning for greater lay democracy, and extended support for members during disputes. We also opposed what we saw as the cronyism of the regional secretary at the time.

We initially held our meetings upstairs in the Lucas Arms pub on Gray's Inn Road, a well-known leftie watering hole. While Sean required a stick to walk and struggled on the stairs he was determined to attend. His enthusiasm and strategic nous were invaluable. Other attendees included Tom Cashman, Leonie Snell, John Childs and five or six from the London passenger section. Ken Fuller, a senior regional officer, was present and played a key role. Peter Kavanagh, a Dial-a-Ride driver, was also very active at the time.

The two major groups in the region were Passenger and Heathrow CAT. By the time I was elected to the regional committee, the regional secretary was from CAT and at the time controlled the CAT & London bus sectors.

We set out to democratise the region by re-energising the Left, especially at regional committee level, where the regional secretary controlled most delegates with a mixture of financial inducements and bullying. We "new kids on the block" set about organising, enthusing and strengthening the Left minority. Sean was a key player and was more than capable to take the arguments and fight to the regional secretary and his cronies on the committee.

On a personal level, I struck up an immediate rapport with Sean as our backgrounds were both second generation London Irish. We shared a similar sardonic sense of humour and musically we had similar tastes such as The Pogues, Blockheads and Alabama 3. Sean made no secret of his love for music, he also loved writing and there are excellent social media posts by him on a myriad of subjects, from culture to politics.

Our activities galvanised the Left and led to a slow undermining of the regional secretary

Without these developments, of which Sean was a chief architect, I do not believe Tony Woodley would have been in such a strong position to win the TGWU general secretary election in 2004. Tony needed to get the most votes in region 1 to win nationally, and the regional Broad Left helped build him electoral support. His opponent was Barry Camfield, a former region 1 regional secretary and assistant general secretary.

HE ALWAYS COVERED YOUR BACK

It helped our group considerably that Sean never backed out of a fight with those in charge of the region. He always covered your back and this wasn't too easy as the atmosphere was deliberately made hostile and intimidating. It helped that Roger Dillon from Fords Dagenham, Brian Holmes, from the food, drink and tobacco section, and later John Murphy, from Potters Bar buses, were active in our group.

Our first major intervention nationally was at the 2005 biennial delegate conference in Blackpool when we had legitimate reservations over some of the content of Tony Woodley's keynote speech, which was an executive statement on proposals to merge with Amicus (I think GMB had pulled out by then). We felt that insufficient time was being given for discussion and the EC statement did not contain sufficient details regarding the structures of the enlarged union.

GOOD SPEAKER

We wrote, printed, and distributed our own leaflets to delegates and Sean, a lay member who was a very good speaker and could sway people, was one of the delegates who addressed the conference to oppose. What he said about needing more time to get things right resonated with delegates. Sean was a powerful public speaker.

Halfway through Tony Woodley's speech the then general secretary recognised he was not convincing those present, and he announced a recall conference at which TGWU members worried about the union losing its identity could put forward ideas to make sure they were included as part of the merger talks (Or at least that's what we thought!).

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

At the time we felt that the lay Left had achieved a fantastic victory. Shortly after, the union announced that the recalled conference was to be a one-day meeting in Birmingham a few days before Christmas. Sean, I and some other friends had booked to hear The Pogues in Brixton the Friday evening before. It looked like a toss-up between The Pogues or Tony Woodley!

It took a lot of soul-searching before we finally agreed to go to the concert and when it finished, I drove Sean to Birmingham in my cab. He spent the whole time singing drunken Pogues classics. Great voice, slurred the lyrics at times, but almost drove me crazy for three hours!

BROAD LEFT CAPTURE KEY POSITIONS

Our activities helped the Broad Left to take over many of the key positions in region 1 of the TGWU and from 2008 onwards the London and Eastern region of Unite.

Sean had increasing mobility problems and had to start using a wheelchair. I particularly recall him speaking at the rally that followed the massive TUC demo against austerity in 2012. He spoke well and he was really buzzing. We had agreed to go for a beer afterwards. After scouring the internet, we found a pub off Edgware Road. It claimed to be wheelchair friendly, and we agreed to meet there after the rally.

We arrived before him to discover scaffolding around the pub. It was partly blocking off the entrance and there was a large doorstep at the only remaining entrance. The "disabled toilets" were in the cellar!

When Sean came along, to share a pint with his friends and comrades he was devastated to be excluded and we both knew it would be impossible to find anywhere else.

He went from articulating the resistance to Tory attacks on disabled people in front of twenty thousand activists to the daily reality of feeling like a second-class citizen. These incidents were commonplace for Sean, and he confided that it was leading to a sense of frustration and increasing social isolation.

Another example was when he would go to Unite executive meetings where his accommodation was booked in the Russell Hotel, which did have rooms with disabled facilities, except one night I had to help Sean enter the hotel through the goods entrance in a dingy rear alleyway, as that was the only working lift able to take his wheelchair from street level to the hotel lobby to access the bedroom lifts.

Also, the only pubs he could go to were the Night and Day or the Penderel's Oak in the close vicinity, as they were the only ones with wheelchair access and easy access to disabled toilets. Other EC delegates had access to all the pubs and restaurants locally. Just another example of the daily grind endured by Sean and thousands of others in a similar position. These physical barriers meant he was unable to mix socially as much as he would have liked, and this placed him at a disadvantage as very often it is through these types of informal social gatherings that political decisions are arrived at.

Sean was a gregarious individual and felt a deep hurt at increasing restrictions on his social life. Despite this he continued to stay strong and focused on his socialist politics.

He continued to attend concerts in his beloved South London, and those featuring the Alabama 3 or to see the ritual Blockheads Christmas reunion gigs with myself Peter Kavanagh, Siobhan Endean, Mick O'Sullivan, and Niamh O'Brady.

At last, due in no small part to the campaigning by Sean and other activists, most major music venues in London were genuinely wheelchair accessible.

Through all of this he was resilient and remained strong. He was still fighting and still attending demos against public sector cuts and austerity, he was still speaking and writing with great clarity on these issues, which he cared so passionately about. He continued to play a big part on our regional committee, was chair of the Unite national disabilities committee and had been elected to the regional executive committee of the London Labour Party in 2019 and was a TUC executive council delegate from Unite.

A LEADER WHO COULD ARTICULATE PEOPLE'S FRUSTRATION, ANGER AND ASPIRATIONS

People viewed him as a leader, and he could articulate people's frustration, anger, and aspirations. He was intelligent, approachable, passionate, and caring. One of his greatest strengths was his resilience and the unquenchable fire in his belly against injustice.

One of his sisters said that if he had not been disabled, he would have been a reporter as he was interested in writing and highlighting discrimination and injustice.

He always had a dry detached irreverent sense of humour, a trait found in many second-generation London Irish. He was a good judge of people, and he was shrewd and street-wise.

Sean made enemies, as we all do, but he was loved and well respected by nearly all that knew him within Unite and was a powerful voice for good.

I will miss a wonderful, amusing, and caring friend; our movement has lost a fine fiery leader. He will be sorely missed by everyone who knew him.



2012 Disabled Members' Conference

Left to right: Berni McCrae, Sean McGovern, Siobhan Edean and Bridget Clemson

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades



Sean addressing the access to work demo
Whitehall in 2015

PART 3: The fight for disabled rights

My memories of Sean and the Remploy struggle

By Claire Glasman, WinVisible

Expanded from a Morning Star article



Sean and Claire outside Parliament circa 1999, with Kate Adams from Incapacity Action. The placard says “Money for life not bombs”. We were protesting about Blair’s government investing in a horrific military research programme and continuing the “incapacity for work” welfare reforms from 1995 which attacked the disability benefit rights of ex-miners.

I met Sean more than 20 years ago at a meeting. He spoke from the floor as a union rep for the Remploy factory in Brixton, where he had previously worked. In contrast to union men who seemed dour and bound by their institution, Sean was cheerful and upbeat, with a twinkle in his eye – and, of course, disabled, which to me was a bonus. Soon after that we started going out, and were in a relationship for a few years. He was living at his mother’s in Stockwell, Lambeth. She was Delia McGovern, whom I also got to know. Later he moved to his own flat nearby. Sean died, aged 63, on 6 May, 2020, within a day of her death.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

As a young man, he'd become disabled from a head injury in a physical attack, and had spent time in hospital and rehab. He was hemiplegic affected down one side but nevertheless he learned a building trade and became a carpenter-joiner. (He had spent the criminal injuries compensation money.) As a progression, he did a degree in construction management. However, he could not keep to that. He joked that when he got to the building site, he could not get up the ladders.

Sean's work ethic was to be strictly nine to five, whereas I was involved in community campaigning, and we sometimes clashed about what to do at weekends. My background was Franklin Delano Roosevelt special school and Great Ormond St Hospital, both institutions with communal living by disabled children and young people, where we were no longer isolated in the family (some children there had been rejected by family and were in care). Without these institutions, I would have been deprived of the company of other disabled children but, together in numbers, we formed our collective resistance to the disability discrimination we felt. I was ignorant about the Remploi factory workers, assuming they must be disadvantaged by being in "sheltered employment". Sean said angrily: "What do you mean – they're unionised!" He meant they had protections which many other workers did not.

It turned out that their employment was not that "sheltered" or different. People worked relatively full hours for low pay, while management enjoyed expensive company cars and other perks. This was the underlying reason why Remploi was dubbed too expensive – without that layer, the work done by disabled employees making school furniture and other government supplies, was productive "value for money".

Liz Sayce, then chief executive of the disability charity RADAR (which merged with other groups to become Disability Rights UK) headed a review for the government which condemned sheltered employment as outdated and backward. The Remploi workers, originally 9,000 strong, were facing an alliance of the government, Remploi management and disability charities agreeing on a programme of factory closures in batches across England, Scotland and Wales. A long struggle followed. In the Remploi factories, union membership was either Unite or GMB. In May 2007, Third Sector charity news reported:

The GMB union is threatening to stage demonstrations outside the headquarters of six disability charities behind a joint letter to the national press at the weekend in support of government plans to close up to 30 Remploi factories employing 5,000 disabled workers.

The chief executives of Leonard Cheshire, Radar, Mencap, Mind, RNID and Scope wrote to The Guardian on Saturday welcoming Remploi's plans to focus its resources on supporting disabled people into mainstream employment.

The letter said that while Remploi factories had been "of real benefit" in the past, disabled people were more likely to be happy working in "the inclusive environment that the rest of us take for granted".

GMB national secretary Phil Davies said Remploi's workers had been "stabbed in the back" by the letter, and condemned "the grotesque scene of the leaders of six disability organisations scuttling around media studios calling for the handing out of redundancy notices to disabled workers".

Les Woodward of the GMB criticised disability figures for telling disabled workers what's best for them. It was a class divide.

WinVisible was among the groups (including Disabled People Against Cuts) who backed the Remploi workers, many of whom were women and women/men of colour. As expected, or planned by government, by February 2015, around two years on from the last factory closure, of 1,507 Remploi staff made redundant (those still remaining), only 774 were in waged work. Of course, disabled people were going to face discrimination in the job market. We heard of evictions and suicide by people who had lost their friends and community and felt they had no prospects. In 2015, the DWP sold Remploi to Maximus, the notorious US company that does assessments of employment and support allowance. At that time, a GMB spokesman said: "The GMB continue to support the exit of Remploi Employment Services from government ownership to the private sector. We are determined to work with the new partner to build on the open, transparent and respectful relationship we currently have."

Remploy is an employment agency arranging individual placements. People placed in work such as supermarkets reported various problems: exhaustion with the unadapted workload, feeling alone and unsupported.

We have faced similar issues with social care and supported accommodation. Day centres being run down and sold off by councils to developers, with the justification that they are outdated. So older and disabled people, people with mental distress no longer have somewhere they can meet up in groups for peer support. The sell-off of Thomas Pocklington flats for visually-impaired people, with communal areas, Scope closing residential homes and breaking up people's closest relationships – let us at the grassroots determine what is best for us, and what transition is to be made, if any, with the resources we need and deserve.

Sean will also be sorely missed by his friends at WinVisible, the Crossroads women's centre, and Payday men's group. Seeing people at meetings, he was always warm and welcoming.

WinVisible was started in the 1980s by disabled women, including co-ordinator Claire Glasman, who were frustrated at finding that their issues never got discussed in mixed disability organisations. It provides a mixture of self-help information, advocacy and individual case work which is combined with campaigning against the brutality of the benefits system.

The organisation is funded by the National Lottery and the Oak Foundation.

<https://winvisibleblog.wordpress.com>



Claire gave Sean this photograph on Valentine's Day
Credit: Claire Glasman

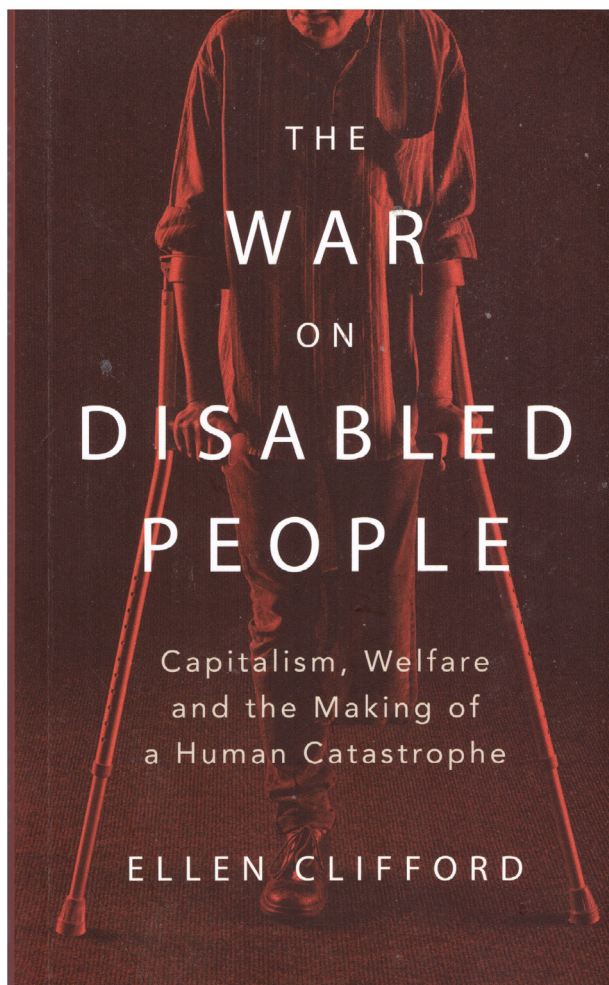
REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

Ellen Clifford

Disabled activist who has worked within the disability sector for over 20 years.

*Ellen Clifford worked with Sean McGovern from 2011 onwards and they became close friends. Ellen, whose 2020 book *The War on Disabled People* is a must read, has worked within the disability sector for over 20 years. She is a voluntary member of the national steering group for Disabled People Against Cuts. (DPAC). Ellen's book reflects policy areas and campaigns that have been most central to activity by DPAC and its allies.*



'A valuable framework for our continued resistance.'

Linda Burnip, Disabled People Against Cuts

'If you want to resist the cold cruelty of the war on disabled people, this book is utterly indispensable.'

John Clarke, Ontario Coalition Against Poverty

'This is a must-read text.'

Peter Beresford, University of Essex and Co-Chair of Shaping Our Lives

DPAC was set up following a protest in Birmingham in October 2010 outside the annual conference of the Tory Party, who were then in Government as part of a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Chancellor George Osborne said in June 2010 that the disability living allowance needed reducing by 20 per cent and those claiming it would face a new medical assessment from 2013 onwards.

Disabled people decided we needed a network of campaigning organisations opposed to austerity and the Tories. Too many groups under New Labour had been incorporated into the engagement processes they adopted. These did not really change or improve anything for disabled people. When elected in 1997, New Labour promised disabled people much and delivered little.

In 2012 many of these campaigning groups came together at a conference, attended by Sean, to set up the Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance. (ROFA) This fitted Sean's vision of class politics, which involved bringing together our movement with the trade unions and within which it would be possible to educate the left and trade union movement about disability.

REMPLOY

I first met Sean in 2011 when he was organising to prevent Remploy factory closures. That was an interesting one as the perspective of the disability movement was that segregated employment was wrong and we

should be pushing for mainstream inclusive employment. Rights not charity.

Consequently, DPAC activists were not minded to stand alongside Remploy workers. We changed our stance when a GMB workplace representative, Les Woodward, wrote to DPAC's co-founder Debbie Jolly and we subsequently joined the struggle. I took the lead on this as I was now living in London. Although I had been very interested in socialist politics from an early age I had not been previously involved with socialist groups or the trade unions and did not know how bureaucratic they and the Labour Party could be. It took a long time to get an agreement via the work of the trade unions for Labour to campaign to scrap universal credit.

At the start there were tensions between Sean and DPAC because we were not used to the slowness of the bureaucracy. Sean called Linda Burnip, DPAC co-founder, undisciplined and she was going to get a T-shirt that said "Undisciplined Bitch". But we found we were coming from similar positions and we were all passionate about the need to bring together the disabled people's movement and the trade union movement. We worked together on this till his death.

Sean was representing Unite members and the GMB also represented them. We wanted workers to occupy factories, the Barking one preferably as it was so close to the 2012 Olympic village and the right-wing media were even complaining about the factory closures. We thought Sean was blocking action but we realised he wanted the same thing. In fact, the disabled workers in the factory did not have the confidence to act independently and they thought the GMB, which was the biggest union, would come through and stop the closures for them. They felt this right to the end and they did not know they needed to take action.

It breaks my heart about how few Remploy workers are now working. Their fears have proved to be realised as all the stats show how the large majority have not found work and how their mental health has suffered due to becoming socially isolated.

Encouraging trade unions to be proactive in fighting welfare reforms and cuts

We wanted to get trade unions more proactive in fighting welfare reforms and the cuts. At the 2013 TUC disabled workers' conference in Congress House, London, we managed to get a speaking invitation for DPAC's Andy Greene. Following this, Sean successfully proposed that delegates leave the building and go out to take direct action to highlight the social security cuts and welfare reform attacks on disabled people by blocking off Tottenham Court Road.

Only one union was opposed and we blocked off the road. We handed out leaflets, which informed people that around 23 per cent of adults have a disability. On seeing visibly disabled people, passers-by were generally supportive. We got lots of publicity and it was the first time that some of those present had taken such direct action. The event encouraged future joint work between unions and disabled people's groups. It was a big success.

Very often, though, we did not get publicity for our actions and so we used social media to get our messages across. Sean's blog was one of many social media accounts.

The campaign closest to Sean's heart was the national independent living fund (ILF), which was established in 1998 to support disabled people with high support needs to live in the community rather than in residential care. A government-commissioned report in 2007 had recommended closing it and absorbing it into the mainstream 'care and support' local authority- administered system.

The fund was closed by the 2010-2015 coalition government to new applicants in December 2010 before a 2012 consultation was launched on its permanent closure, affecting 18,000 disabled people. DPAC and Inclusion London were at the forefront of a legal and political campaign that failed to halt its closure in 2015 but they did force the Conservative government to award four years' further funding to English local authorities for 'former ILF recipients.' This totalled £700 million but it was not ring-fenced and each local authority did its own thing with it and boroughs that chose to ignore it faced no consequences. A year after it closed it was found that eight London boroughs had cut individual support packages to disabled people by 50 per cent or more.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

SEAN HELPS BLOCK LAMBETH COUNCIL CUTS TO THE DISABLED PEOPLE'S SUPPORT PACKAGES

Sean, especially with his role in his day job, was able to make sure that Lambeth Council did not go in and make cuts as heavily. He was able to make a big difference and without him and his energy there would have been more disabled people who would have got their support packages cut quite quickly. He was always watching what the council was doing and putting pressure on them.

He was very frightened himself that his own support package would be cut and he got me to advocate for him in his final review. It is true that I worked in the same building as him and we also lived near to each other so we often chatted about his situation. When you think about this it is amazing.

Sean was very capable of putting over his own case, he had done many similar exercises on behalf of others and yet he needed help on his own case.

It illustrates his fear and that of disabled people generally at having to constantly justify why they need funds that are essential to being able to get out and participate in society. Without his care package he would have mirrored the situation of many disabled people and be housebound.

Paula Peters

Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC)

<https://dpac.uk.net>

I was born in Bromley in 1971 and I am the eldest of three children. I come from a long line of trade union and labour movement activists. Nelly Deakin, my great grandmother, was from Newcastle. She was part of the suffragette movement that successfully fought for the right of women to vote. I learnt about this after my grandparents died. Nelly, who worked in an East London laundry, stayed quiet about her involvement throughout her life as she feared being blacklisted.



Paula Peters and Steve Turner

GREAT GRANDMOTHER

My great grandmother later became a nurse. She was passionate about universal health care. She was a big fan of Nye Bevan, who founded the NHS, having met him on four occasions. Nelly was also passionate about the impact of drink-driving. One of her last campaigns was with Barbara Castle for the introduction in 1967 of the breathalyzer test that was aimed at stopping drink-driving. My grandmother had in her job witnessed the tragic consequences of drink-driving.

My great grandmother believed that your rights are hard won and you must continue to fight for them as they can be taken away at any time – even the right to vote.

I was diagnosed at an early age with hypomobility joint syndrome. I first had hydrotherapy at the age of eight and my first campaign was to save the local hydrotherapy pool from closing. I helped raise over £600k to build one and we are now fighting to keep it open as it currently serves a million people in SE London. The pool helped me to walk as the staff there taught me to swim. We take the NHS for granted and we should not do so, especially as the government are taking services away.

I was a civil servant and I had a breakdown at my desk at the age of 22. Mental health rights are very much in my mind as I have been through the psychiatric system and witnessed the abuses in it. The stigma of mental distress is something Sean and I felt passionately about. I was involved in the mental health survivor movement in the early 90s and I set up a Bromley mental health users' group.

I wanted to stop the 2007 Mental Health Act as it created the provision of compulsory treatment orders against people's will. I find this abhorrent.

WORK CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS DAMAGES DISABLED PEOPLE

In the first year of the 2010-15 coalition government, I was left heartbroken when my friend Carol took her own life on 16th December 2010. I was seeing other friends going through the work capability assessment process that had damaged her. In April 2012 I joined Facebook and found the Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) organisation and I have been active in it ever since.

Sean and I met through the "Kill ATOS" campaign. This was aimed at highlighting the highly degrading ATOS work capability assessment process that often wrongly classified people as fit for work and which led to a loss of essential benefits and which, in turn, led to the deaths of many disabled people.

We did a lot of work together and he encouraged my trade union work. I joined the Unite community and became the chair of my branch.

EFFECTIVE CHAIR

At our final meeting we were organising a conference on how to support workers with mental health who were suffering distress because of work. What were their rights and what help could Unite give to ensure they got them? Sadly, Sean passed away before the conference could take place.

In August 2019 we did a universal credit hunger protest outside the Department for Work and Pensions at which he spoke warmly and, as usual, engaged with the audience. When DPAC engaged in direct action and blocked off roads he quite enjoyed taking part as we held up our banners. He liked getting trade unionists involved with solidarity actions by disabled people and vice versa. There will always be campaigns for disabled people to get involved with such things as opposing cuts to Transport for London. Sean was working with the RMT and Unite to build a bigger campaign.

Sean was very much in the forefront of the Reclaiming Our Futures alliance and of working along with trade unions in fighting for our rights. He was the bridge between us in establishing solidarity.

We are in a very dark political time internationally. Disabled people's rights are being eroded everywhere and we have got a lot more work to do. All the rights we had won have been eroded over the last 30 years. Disabled people are dying, they are being excluded from society and we will always be fighting to get our voices heard. We must protect what we still have and fight to get more equality until we are fully included in society and, like everyone, have the same rights, which must, of course, be improved for other marginalised communities such as women and black people.

SHOCK AT HIS DEATH

When Sean died there was such a mass outpouring of shock. It showed the massive amount of respect he had earned for his endeavours. It is an amazing legacy, he touched so many people and empowered so many disabled people to get involved in trade union activism and we will always be grateful to him for that.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

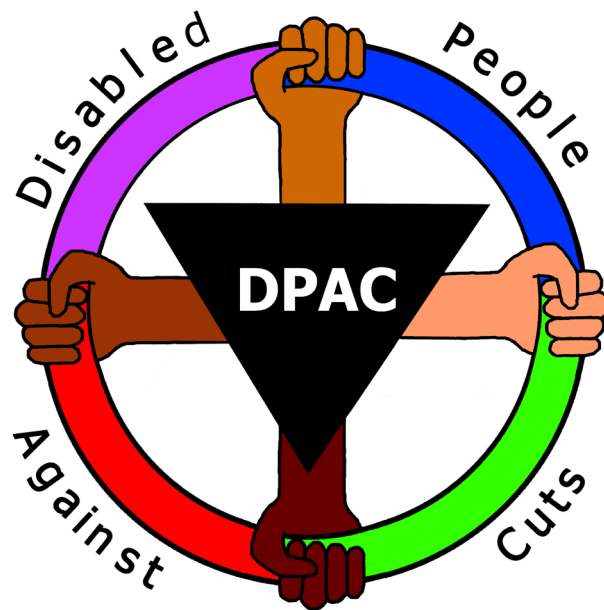
DONATE TO DPAC

https://www.paypal.com/donate?token=NzyqHFXHyXIHKFUIL5M0qZ9p8ydf3yEs_S2kaTZgKl-p0IWMER_H4UunB_HYQz0ZnL0keJtIFP90ky5

You could also send via Paypal to email address mail@dpac.uk.net

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A TRADE UNION CHAMPION FOR DISABLED PEOPLE



Sean with Andy Greene (DPAC) on a direct action event at the entrance to the Tory Party Conference in Manchester in October 2015

REMEMBERING **SEAN McGOVERN**

by his family, friends and comrades



Sean speaking at 2011 TUC demonstration

PART 4: The Labour Party

Marsha De Cordova

Labour member of Parliament for Battersea

I first met Sean McGovern over a decade ago at a Vauxhall constituency Labour Party meeting. He really encouraged me to get active within my union Unite.

I was working at Action for Blind People, which was then part of the Royal National Institute for the Blind.

I was active alongside Sean in the Unite South East disabled members' section and on the Unite London and South East members' committee. He often explained to me union structures and how they were supposed to work.

CONSTANT ENCOURAGEMENT TO STAND AS A POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR WORKING CLASS PEOPLE

Sean was constantly encouraging me to stand for different positions including for Parliament as an MP. This idea initially frightened me but Sean highlighted how there were too few working class people in prominent positions in the Labour and trade union movement. I am a black disabled woman.

Primarily, disabled rights are what I live, breathe and die for. Sean had a similar passion and he was a trade unionist, a socialist and a campaigner for disabled and social rights.

Sean taught me how to do direct, non-violent direct action. In 2013 at a TUC disabled workers' conference in London a large number of delegates voted to leave Congress House and shut down the roads around Tottenham Court Road in order to highlight the attacks on disabled people by the Tory-Lib Dem coalition government. In spite of the significant traffic disruption we caused, we got a good reception from people who witnessed our action. I subsequently participated in a number of protests, conferences, public meetings and events nationally alongside Sean and he very often took a prominent role in them. He was a brave person.

He was a good orator and it meant he was always on the speakers' platform as he was inspiring to listen to. He also chaired an event with great skill. If you were to ask any trade union leader they would know and recognise Sean for his talent, drive and hard work.

In 2014 I established a small charity – South East London Vision – at the premises where Sean worked. We were both fighting for local people in Lambeth. He also had his own struggle, in which he was successful, to get direct payments and to be allocated an accessible home that would allow him to live independently. He fought his whole life for himself and many, many others.

Sean encouraged me to stand as a Labour Party councillor for the Larkhall ward on Lambeth Council in 2014. He helped with my election campaign and he was delighted when I was successful.

He also encouraged me to stand for Parliament in 2017. When I subsequently became the elected MP for Battersea we continued working together and I have photographs of him chairing gatherings in Parliamentary meeting rooms. He liked to dress well and his confidence in his socialist beliefs came through strongly at these gatherings. He could certainly hold his own in discussions.

Like me, Sean was a strong advocate of the independent living fund as we both wanted to ensure disabled people receive the backing they need to live independent lives.

Because of Sean's involvement, alongside other disabled people in groups such as DPAC, in opposing the attacks on disabled people since 2010 we have been left a coherent programme around which we need to

REMEMBERING **SEAN McGOVERN**

by his family, friends and comrades

keep fighting. We have to be the voice of the voiceless.

I will fight to make sure that Sean's legacy means that any future Labour government introduces the UN convention on the Rights of Persons of Disabilities as that is the benchmark of not only showing a concern for human rights but of disabled persons' rights being fulfilled.

COVID

Sean would have been devastated about the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people and how six in every 10 deaths has been of sick or disabled persons. Many disabled people have also lost their jobs during the pandemic. The employment gap has widened.

The government's actions have turned back the clock for disabled people and even the language they use has not moved forward with the times.

Sean and I both believed in the social model of disability. We opposed a society which disables impaired people by not providing information in accessible formats or not designing buildings that are fully wheelchair accessible.

The government, though, is centred on the medicalised model. By categorising people as "clinically extremely vulnerable" they will only catch a number. It will not capture those much larger numbers of people with learning disabilities who will not get support they need.

Clearly, there is still much to do to improve the lives of disabled people. The trade union movement does need to do more on the issue. I am, however, confident that thanks to Sean McGovern my own union, Unite, knows this and remains committed to doing so by constantly ensuring that the rights of disabled are being fought for. Sean should never be forgotten for his efforts and I am delighted to have contributed to this booklet on his life.



Marsha De Cordova

Photo Credit: Mark Thomas



Marsha De Cordova (Pictured in centre)

Photo Credit: Mark Thomas

REMEMBERING **SEAN McGOVERN**

by his family, friends and comrades



Sean speaking at the 2016 TUC conference

PART 5: In his own words

What follows is a small selection of articles that Sean wrote between 2010 and 2020 for his blogs.

BombasticSpastic: A look at life's quirkiest through a jaundiced eye and a mind open to all except that to which it's hermetically sealed . . . <http://bombasticspastic.blogspot.com>

2010

Disability hate crime
The public deficit
PAIN
My heart and soul still march against injustice
The Windmill Inn – school days

2011

Report from March 26 demo
Hyde Park speech
Lambeth and the cuts
"How can the newer NHS hospitals compete?"
A short history of Remploy
"She was also seen using . . . the swimming pool."
Strike day
Suspected victims of Nazi euthanasia found in Austria

2012

Remploy vs Access to Work
Remploy workers vote to strike!
Remploy's final chapter

2013

What have the unions ever done for Remploy?
ATOS members vote for action
Disabled trade unionists and disabled grass roots campaigners bring central London to a standstill!
What has DPAC ever done for us?

2014

Build our way back to economic recovery

2016

Poem on REMPLOY's demise
Brexit broken promises
Create a national care service
Scrap the changes to disabled children's transport
The running down of our NHS
Vote Remain
M. Ali

2017

Asylum seeker seriously ill in hospital
'Austerity is the mother of invention' boasts a Tory health minister
Now we know the impact of deregulation – people perishing unnecessarily in horrendous blazes

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

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Direct payments is not a universal panacea
McCluskey's record on Corbyn
Corbyn and Ireland
Some small crimes no longer investigated by our broken police forces
Tebbit droning on about drones
Unite's community branches

2018

Access to Work award
Booking an accessible venue is only the first part of ensuring full access for disabled people.
Carnation for a song
Elin Ersson – a true fighter against injustice
Let's create a national independent living support service
Pick up your wheelchair and walk I was advised
STOP AND SCRAP UNIVERSAL CREDIT
The Alabama 3, joined by Robert Chaney, and The Galway Street Club in one evening

2019

Corbyn is correct in not pushing for a peoples vote on Brexit
The creation of a 'national independent living support service'
The reality of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party

2020

PIP PIP Hurray
Net the minnows: But also go after the whales



Sean outside 336 Brixton for the launch of Operation Disabled vote in April 2015 to empower disabled people to register to vote at the General Election

2010

DISABILITY HATE CRIME

We'll probably never know whether the feckless character of Lou (in the TV show Little Britain) has directly contributed to any disability hate crimes. Just as it would be difficult to prove that rags such as the Heil incite demonization of disabled people – although the on-line replies to Daily Heil stories do go some way to opening a window to the viciousness and nastiness of many of their readers.

The problem with the Andy and Lou sketches and the repeated attacks on disabled people by the scurrilous right wing media is that some of it rubs off. A few years ago, paedophiles were flavour of the month. Elements within the right-wing press began to act as judge and jury and, as a result their reckless actions, whipped up a vigilante attitude in several parts of the country.

People came out onto the streets baying for the blood of paedophiles. Sickening sights of toddlers displaying placards scrawled with hate were across our screens. There were even cases of men being wrongly identified as child molesters (due to a similarity in name) and driven from their homes.

In one incident someone got paedophile and paediatrician mixed up daubing the outside of a paediatrician's house with the 'Paedo' mark of shame.

When we are dealing with people who are so susceptible to exterior influences, such as the word of a newspaper, is it so wide of the mark that they'll react to what is supposed to be a comedy sketch. Especially, when the right wing press actually go out of their way to take the comedy sketch out of its comedic context and use it as an example of disabled people cheating the system.

After all, when columnists like Rod Liddle from such respected publications as the Times call upon readers to drag people from their wheelchairs and take them by the scruff of their necks off to the nearest Job Centre, what hope is there for us being treated with fairness?

THE PUBLIC DEFICIT

The current deficit is only 30% of the one we found ourselves with in 1945; yet, we went ahead then and created a Welfare State, as well as funding a massive 1 million social housing project.

We could also look to raise revenue by:

- Imposing a Robin Hood tax on banks;
- Raising tax thresholds on earners over £100,000;
- Pursuing the tax cheats who cost the country anything up to £100 billion a year.

The ConDem's plans to slash public service/sector budgets by anything up to 40% will lead to anything up to three quarters of a million jobs losses. As many public contracts are won by companies in the private sector we'll also see massive job losses here as contracts, such as those for schools, are shelved.

The idea that the private sector will somehow take up the slack from this debacle is risible. Manufacturing is on its knees. Look at the markets that would attract our manufactured goods: Europe, an economic basket case; USA, sliding back into recession; China and India, both these powers are looking at a downturn in growth.

If this regime carries out its plans, we'll slip into a double-dip recession next year. We could then be looking at four to five million unemployed. But then, the last time the Tories were in power they were quite happy to allow mass unemployment to seize the country.

Wealthy Tories can afford to take these kinds of hits every so often; they even act as a catharsis. When the corner is turned they're presented with millions of hungry eager people willing to take on any work under any conditions.

By the time we come to a lull in this recession (they never really end; merely stop to take breath) we'll have sold off the NHS and most of our social services will be in the voluntary sector. Employees will be increasingly taken on under short-term contracts; the zero-hour contract will be a familiar form of 'employment'; the poverty gap will become a chasm.

We need to open our eyes. The summer of 2010 is the beginning of a new class war. The enemy has positioned itself; it's fired off a few salvos. If we don't begin to defend our positions they will roll over us and smash us to pieces.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

FRIDAY, 26 MARCH 2010

1.17 AM

Pain predominates,
Sleep's put on hold,
I stare at the screen,
And, let the night unfold.

My eyes are all itchy
My arse is quite numb;
While the pain burrows,
Deep into my spine.

Neck and shoulders,
They take secondary action,
As though in solidarity,
To my spine's infraction.

My only hope,
Is for fatigue to take hold;
And, for the pain,
To admit that it's beaten.

Yet, I don't feel,
This'll happen,
For some time yet,
So move over night,
And, give me room . . .

SATURDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2010

MY HEART AND SOUL STILL MARCH AGAINST INJUSTICE

Alas, my days of actively demonstrating are coming to an end. But, don't take this as me surrendering to the vagaries of age; nor an admission that being disabled in some way means I need wrapping up and protecting, as this isn't the case.

While it should be the inalienable right for all of us to get out and demonstrate it isn't always practicable for some disabled people to always take part in such events. An example that comes to mind is the Wapping dispute back in 1986-87. Though back then I wasn't affiliated to any political party or group, another floating leftie in a sea of Thatcher's misery, trade union and movement campaigns excited my interest.

After visiting the picket line several times I quickly realised that this dispute, like the miners' strike a couple of years before, was a defining moment in the history of my class. Though only at the periphery of the action I believed, as I still do, that solidarity and support for such action is the fuel that keeps the engine ticking over.

Back then, in my late 20s, my disabilities were nowhere near as incapacitating as they became; and, though I had weakness down my left side and walked with a pronounced limp, I got around relatively easily. A major inconvenience was that I couldn't run – oh, and I still felt conscious and in some ways vulnerable about the plate in my head.

On my way to a march one day back in '86 I met up with some NGA and Sogat mates; one of them pulled me to one side and warned me something 'heavy' could go down and because of my situation it could be dangerous for me to be take part in that day's action.

He conveyed this to me in such a way that I agreed, took part in the beginning of the march and then split away and went for a drink. Back in Stockwell later that night I was having a drink in a pub watching TV news coverage of vicious mounted police attacks on trade unionists at Wapping – my mate was correct.

Had I been present there is a strong likelihood I'd have been attacked by the police as my safety mechanism is broken (I can't run); and, with a weakened skull blows from a baton or truncheon could have proved fatal.

Coming back to today's demonstrations; I'm still at a disadvantage. Again, I still can't run; and, though now in a wheelchair I can't even push that at any appreciable speed. Given that I need to use a toilet with great frequency, every 40-60 minutes; I'd be really disadvantaged in a kettling situation – I'm sure Lily Law wouldn't take my particular needs into consideration.

So, what do I do? How can I exercise my right to demonstrate against the tyrannies that are being heaped upon us today? That is, how can I peacefully participate without fear of being confined in one area by the police for maybe eight hours without access to basic facilities such as toilets? Within a couple of hours I'd pee myself without proper amenities.

Much as I want to personally engage in actions against this vicious crew of a coalition, these wreckers of our welfare state, am I selfish in also wishing to preserve my dignity and health?

Therefore, students, trade unionists, public service workers, HNS employees, teachers, fire fighters et al, though, I may not be visible on these marches, please, rest assured that my heart and soul marches to the beat of your revolutionary drums.

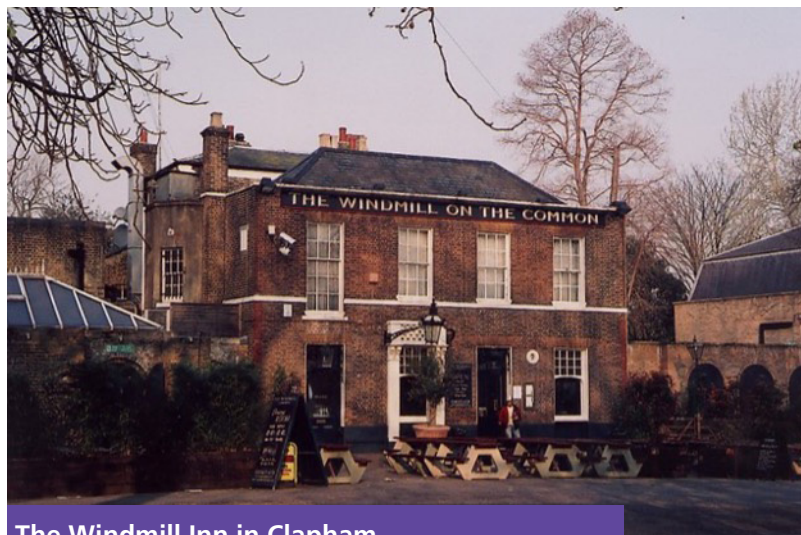
In the struggle.

Sean McGovern

THE WINDMILL INN

I attended St Gerard's School, Clapham Common South Side, from 1968-73. As I recall some of my most productive hours back then were spent in the public bar of the Windmill Inn. Ah, far happier less complicated times.

The Windmill stood on Clapham Common, set back slightly from the main road, directly opposite the front of our school; and on hot summer's days many is the time my attention was drawn from "Harry" Horn's waffle about the importance of chess and Dickens or Jim Smith's over-enthusiastic take on some battle or other in this country's distance bloody past, and through the classroom windows across the A3 past a clump of trees to the frontage of the pub. So tantalisingly near; yet so unattainably distant.



The Windmill Inn in Clapham

Towards the end of the fifth year a few of us in the class, having already abandoned our school uniforms, used to pop into the bar at lunchtimes. Most of us were pub users anyway, had been for a while.

Funny really, just how quickly we made that transition from snotty-nosed schoolboys to young urbane men of the world. Not so very long before the pub had served another purpose for when fractiousness exploded amongst us boys, the chilling words would be intoned: "Right, behind the Windmill after school, you're dead."

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

Oh, the expectations of those words, two young Achilleses pitting their martial prowess in hand-to-hand fighting? No – more like two scared lads. By the end of the school day, they were wondering whether a note from their mums might excuse them from the imminent ritual. No chance. The attendant baying mob had paid to see blood; and blood they'd get.

Pushed together the crestfallen warriors would trade a few unimpressive slaps. One would then escalate events by putting the other in a neck-lock. Within seconds they'd be rolling around on the ground. This was the cue for crowd participation and they started to kick the remaining dignity from the fallen heroes.

2011

SUNDAY, 17 APRIL 2011

REPORT FROM MARCH 26 DEMO

The TUC disability committee agreed that the TUC 'March for the Alternative' should be an event that highlighted the severity of cuts experienced – and to be experienced – by disabled people in the UK. Without claiming a hierarchy of cuts, disabled people can look forward to the following:

1. A reduction of 20% of claimants when Disability Living Allowance changes to a Personal Independence Payment
2. Possibility of 80,000 living in residential homes losing Disability Living Allowance Mobility Component;
3. Migration from incapacity benefit to jobseeker's allowance will find scores of thousands of disabled people financially worse off;
4. Contributory ESA, paid only to those with sufficient NI contributions, is to be time limited to 12 months;
5. A work capacity assessment that is viewed by all except the nasty right as draconian;
6. If migrated to JSA people losing disability status; thus, unable to access extra resources given to disabled jobseekers;
7. The Independent Living Fund being scrapped – this will cause thousands of disabled people to be trapped in their homes;
8. Housing benefit cuts;
9. The removal of security of tenure from social housing tenants, this disproportionately impacts on disabled people;
10. Eligibility criteria dropped for all but critical care support. This will mean people with substantial care needs not being able to bathe themselves; being unable to clean themselves after voiding their bowels; not being able to shop or cook;
11. Care packages cut; whereby disabled people will receive the most rudimentary of care and support; maybe just enough to fend off hunger and illness. No provision for poverty of the soul; or social starvation;
12. Access to Work is cutting back on items it will fund. Thus, employers becoming more loathe than they already are to employ disabled people;
13. Supported employment schemes, including Remploy, threatened with closure, by fair means and foul;
14. Cuts to community transport systems;
15. Removal of eligibility for Freedom Passes to people with mental health disabilities – experts in this field of disability are predicting a rise in suicides as a direct result of isolating people with mental health disabilities from families, friends and support networks;
16. Reductions in the TaxiCard's subsidy; the contribution made by the user doubling; and, the two-swipe system being abolished. So, limiting the resource to around about a one-mile journey.
17. Cuts in police budgets will see setbacks in their response to disability hate crimes.

As can be seen, disabled people are really under the cosh. But then, we're an easy target. The wheel that can't turn won't squeak; so, no grease for us. Except, our small voice and near-invisibility was noted by the TUC and, accordingly, we were told we could have a presence at the front of the march. This wasn't an act of charity; no, it was a political decision made in order that people watching this march would see that the movement has disability at its heart; not some bolt-on remembered after the event.

AS THE CHAIR OF THE TUC DISABILITY COMMITTEE, AND DUE TO MY PROFILE WITHIN THE WIDER DISABILITY MOVEMENT, I WAS CHOSEN TO SPEAK ON BEHALF OF DISABLED PEOPLE.

When chosen it was agreed that my speech should reach out to disabled people in and out of work; people with visible and invisible disabilities; those with physical and sensory as well as those with learning and mental health disabilities.

This was no easy task. On the one hand I was presented with a lengthy list of cuts and a plethora of different organisations and impairment specific groups all hoping to get a mention. In the end I decided to be impairment non-specific. Disability is disability and can be a distraction, divisive even, when people try to force their particular area of disability, or more usually impairment, up the agenda.

The one concession to disability organisations I did make within the speech was to mention 'Remploy' by name – my 16 years of first working for Remploy, then organising and representing members, holds a special place in my heart. Other than that, it was disability organisation-free.

It's probably no boast to state that the 26th March protest attracted more disabled demonstrators than any single event, probably ever. We turned up in our thousands in chairs, on crutches, with sticks. We came with friends, with carers/PAs, trade union branches, disability organisations and alone. We marched, hobbled and wobbled, were pushed and pushed ourselves along. With or without vision we wended our way along the route drinking in the sights, sounds, smells as well as feeling the frisson of electricity, of hope, generated by hundreds of thousands of people with a common cause.

The feedback I've had from both disabled marchers and rally-goers is positive, mainly.

TUESDAY, 29 MARCH 2011

SEAN'S MARCH 26 HYDE PARK SPEECH

The first link is to my speech to hundreds of thousands of people in Hyde Park at around 3.45pm on Saturday 26th March, 2011; the second opens up the other speeches.

<http://vimeo.com/21652229>

<http://vimeo.com/album/1562316/page:4>

THURSDAY, 2 JUNE 2011

LAMBETH AND THE CUTS

There is little doubt now that disabled people are taking the brunt of these Tory-led cuts; cuts that, if allowed to continue, will see the demise of a welfare state once the envy of working people the world over. A welfare state, which incorporated an NHS, a scheme, which at its best, cared medically for the individual from the cradle to the grave – free at the point of need.

These cuts and deprivations are raining down on us both nationally and locally. So, if the Tory storm misses you nationally, you can bet on a sustained downpour from your local council. Nationally, disabled people are undergoing migration from incapacity benefit and income support to, if they're fortunate, employment support allowance or ESA work-related activity group; or, if they're unfortunate, jobseeker's allowance – accompanied by a massive fall in income.

Should you be wrongly assessed onto JSA there is a strong likelihood that the DWP will deem you unqualified for DLA, thus this benefit would also be withdrawn. Anyone finding themselves in this predicament should file for an appeal, as many appellants successfully get themselves reassessed upwards.

Lambeth Council, to its everlasting shame, has made cuts of £37 million for this financial year. The cuts have hit home viciously, with organisations such as People First Lambeth (PFL), a self-help group for adults with learning disabilities, losing their funding grant. This is not only a loss for disabled people in the borough. Social enterprises and businesses will lose out. PFL were the experts in their field. Lambeth has lost something irreplaceable with the closure of PFL.

Sadly, many other voluntary groups have also lost funding. So much so that many have had to pare back their

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

services to disabled people in Lambeth. Just as we think we're making progress; just when we begin to feel the benefits of living in a wealthy country in the second decade of the 21st century, casino capitalists begin playing recklessly with our futures; opportunistic multi-millionaire politicians set their ideological deficit-busting in train.

While we poured money into depleted bank vaults, these banks greedily took the money, re-financed, and locked their vaults against small businesses and new mortgages. Bloated on our money these banks continued paying out obscene bonuses. Thus, in saving the banking system the country took on a large deficit.

So, who does the government pick on. Do they go to the source, the banks? No, they attack the public service jobs and services. In true Tory style, they sacrifice jobs over investment.

The government could have taken a different direction. Had they chased down tax cheats as doggedly as they pursue benefit cheats, the deficit would be taken care of. A Robin Hood tax could generate tens of billions per annum while barely registering on individual speculative bank transactions.

Rather than forcing their own class in the financial services sector to pay its share, this regime places the burden on the poor. Unlike their wealthy neighbours, poorer paid people and those on fixed incomes are the backbone of our economy. Disabled and elderly citizens, often, spend most of their income within their local economies. They pay more of their income on rents, a greater proportion on food, and they spend benefits on services such as care provision – employing others locally.

Disabled and elderly people and public services workers, we're the goose laying the golden egg. The golden egg of taxes, NI and spending in the local economy. Take away these jobs, these services and benefits, and the golden eggs stop being laid.

The near future could see further cuts in areas such as care, taxicard, and freedom passes. All these three areas are currently under consultation. There is a strong likelihood that care costs will rise while individual care packages may be cut.

The taxicard service will become diluted. Customers will receive fewer journeys; the cost of individual trips will rise; the overall subsidy will be eroded. Basically, an individual journey will be far shorter; this will shrink the personal boundaries within which we live; friends and families living relatively short distances away will go unvisited.

Similarly, discretionary freedom passes for mental health service users could be abolished. People from these groups are predicting a rise in suicides amongst their number. In abolishing the pass, the council is in effect imprisoning many hundreds of people; unable to visit friends, families, and support groups some will find such enforced isolation intolerable.

I cannot sit by and let the few destroy my class! I will not stand by and see my welfare state destroyed and sold off for short-term profit! I will resist these thieves in our midst!

WEDNESDAY, 27 JULY 2011

"HOW CAN THE NEWER NHS HOSPITALS COMPETE?"

"How can the newer NHS hospitals compete?" someone asked on a website forum.

How indeed; but, more to the point, why are we even considering competition when it comes to the provision of medical treatment and care? Health, education, social services, why the hell are we still striving for competition in these areas of social welfare?

It's bad enough trying to run areas such as public transport competitively. They told us the old British Rail system was inefficient, too costly to the public. So, they smashed the system to smithereens, all in the name of efficient competition, and sold it to be privately run. Fifteen years ago the publicly-run rail system cost the country £1B to run; today that figure has risen fivefold to an incredible £5B! Fares in the UK are also the highest in Europe.

That's competition for you.

Forcing hospitals to compete with one and other for patients is obscene. When a hospital fails to successfully compete, they attract financial penalties. How on earth can a hospital, invariably in a poor and deprived area, be expected to compete after it's lost some of its funding to fines for not being competitive enough?

What next; bombing countries for peace?

SATURDAY, 20 AUGUST 2011

A SHORT HISTORY OF REMPLOY

Remploy was set up under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 by Ernest Bevin, who was then Minister of Labour, to become yet another plank in the Welfare State formed by the Atlee government in 1945.

After the Second World War, Clement Attlee's Labour government was not about to repeat the pitiful scenes 30 years earlier of limbless soldiers playing mouth-organs on the streets.

"One of the finest Acts of Parliament ever put on the statute book is to see that these people are not left like flotsam and jetsam on the beach of society, but are put somewhere where they can be happy and of use to the community," said then Minister of Labour, George Isaacs, on opening the first factory.

So, Remploy was formally founded in April 1945. Its first factory opened in Bridgend, South Wales, in 1946. It made violins and furniture and many of the workers were disabled miners.

'Remploy' was an early brand name which was originally registered by the Ex-Services Employment Corporation.

Derived from 're-employ', the name was adopted by Remploy in 1946. Until then it was called the Disabled Persons Employment Corporation.

At its height Remploy had around 100 factories spread across England, Scotland and Wales, employing over 10,000 disabled workers. The factories produced and manufactured goods and services ranging from, in the early days, violin making and book binding through to furniture making; Remploy workers were skilled covering a wide spectrum of sectors from textiles to motor components.

It was Tory minister, Michael Portillo, who kick-started Remploy's decline, when in 1994 he ended a scheme guaranteeing the factories' priority for government contracts. This imposed competitive tendering on the company.

By 1995 Peter Thurnham, a then Tory MP who crossed the floor to the LibDems in 1996, wrote a paper calling for Remploy to be taken under the private sector umbrella, where he felt it would be more successful.

<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=1995-06-14a.707.4&s=REMPLOY>

Down the years the Trade Union Consortium has lobbied successive governments complaining about the quality and commitment of the people running Remploy.

Here is an example of a squandered opportunity:

A few years ago, Mike Eavis (the Glastonbury Festival site owner) wanted to source the T-shirts locally. In collaboration with the trade unions, he offered one of Remploy's Cornwall sites a £1 million-pound contract. Remploy prevaricated about it for a long time. When challenged, a Remploy board member complained about the £50,000 set-up costs!

In late 1999 Remploy announced it was going to merge a number of its factories and close others. Anything up to 20 sites were to be affected. On a cold February afternoon around 60 Remploy workers and trade union activists from around the country assembled outside Parliament and held a 24-hour vigil.

Though few in number we made our presence felt. MP after MP came out to us to give support and solidarity to our cause. John Snow, Channel 4 newscaster, stopped and spoke with us for half-an-hour. Within a few days of the protest a moratorium was placed on the closures – Remploy was safe for the time being.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

From January 2006, each Remploy factory has had the right to a minimum of one reserved public contract. Despite this the company did very little to seriously take advantage of this resource.

And, as a consequence the factories continued on a downward trajectory until in May 2007, the company announced a tranche of factory mergers and closures. This galvanised the unions into action. Demonstrations and rallies were organised up and down Britain. Every major city with a Remploy site held some kind of action. I remember going to Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Poole, Swansea, Cardiff, Glasgow, Stirling, Leatherhead, and, of course, London.

But, despite the Remploy crusade, which saw a team of activists travelling by coach to every site on the closure list from Inverness down to Cornwall, 2008 saw 30 factories shutting down throwing 2,500 disabled people out of work – over three years after the event around 85% of those who accepted the voluntary redundancy are still without jobs.

Three years on, and with the same indifferent people running the company into the ground, Liz Sayce of Radar, a disability charity with a vested interest in seeing Remploy factories close, submitted the finding of her government-commissioned review of employment support for disabled people: 'Getting in, staying in and getting on'.

Her findings are that Remploy factories are not an efficient way to engage disabled people in the workplace. She believes mainstream employment is the only solution to employing disabled people; and, that the subsidy currently enjoyed by Remploy factories should not be renewed. Any factories that cannot survive without a subsidy should either close down or be taken over as a co-operative venture or social enterprise. Obviously, it is pointless trying to start up either a co-op or social enterprise if there is no work on the books.

On the positive side, Sayce calls for moneys saved from Remploy and residential training courses to be ploughed into access to work, the one area she supports. The problem is that the government isn't committed to getting disabled people into work; no, it is committed to reducing its benefits bill, and pushing disabled people off IB and ESA is their goal. There is no indication that the government is going to increase the A2W budget; indeed, there are signs that they may well add to a growing list of items no longer available to people through A2W.

Up to the present day, Remploy activists are once more being called to arms. Though some of us haven't recovered from the last battle, it's hard to get over the emotional trauma of seeing workplaces close down as comrades stand by, many in tears, feeling that their right to work has been snatched from them along with their dignity; they look into a dark and uncertain future.

But, we will fight on, because as Tony Woodley put it all those years ago . . . "if we fight we may not always win – but if we don't fight, we will surely lose."

"SHE WAS ALSO SEEN USING . . . THE SWIMMING POOL."

"She was also seen using . . . the swimming pool." So concluded a report on a woman charged with disability benefit fraud.

Well, that did it for me. It's selfish people like this woman, having the temerity to pretend to be disabled; but not content with this subterfuge she then has the audacity to compound the situation by going swimming. Disabled people making out, somehow or other, that they can use the properties of water that almost render the swimmer weightless, thus allowing greater freedom and movement of otherwise rigid and weak limbs blah, blah, blah.

This is a blatant abuse of what is after all a commonly used public resource. Can we expect this class of people to intrude into our everyday lives? What next? They'll be shopping, making out as though supermarkets can really in any meaningful way cater for their, well let's be honest, strange needs. This is truly thin-end-of-the-wedge territory we're getting into here. Why, they'll probably come up with some excuse next as to why they should be allowed to drive by themselves. The very idea of one of these people let loose on our highways.

Goodness, the very notion has made me come across unnecessary. At this rate I'll have to book myself a course of treatment at my local flotation tank centre; at least I'll be safe from these disabled types there . . .

they don't float as well, do they?

STRIKE DAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2011



Sean McGovern speaking at the rally in Windrush Square on 30 November 2011

Brixton's Windrush Square is always an interesting space, but on Wednesday it was more electric than its famous neighbour a few score metres away. Lambeth people are not by nature the shy and retiring types, as was evident on Strike Day.

About 300 to 350 of us basked under a blue sky on an unusually mild late November morning opposite the seat of power in Lambeth, but we were in undisputed 'FREE LAMBETH' territory. This space and this day was ours!

Whistles and vuvuzelas blew while a constant reggae beat thrummed the air. Chants and signing competed with the reggae and whistles giving the whole thing a carnival feel.

Bang in the middle of the square sat the 'battle car'. This vehicle was driven around the borough earlier in the morning taking in some of the picket lines.

At around 11am people began making speeches. Though the variety of speakers was wide and their words very different, the message was the same. We're not going to allow this government, or any other, to smash our welfare state or sell off our NHS. Nor are we going to stand by and let this bunch of privileged millionaire and billionaire government steal our pensions from us.

Just after midday the speeches ended and some of the people left to join the bigger demonstrations in Central London.

This government is trying to play down the effect of our strike; Maude has even lied about the numbers taking part in the actions on live television. Yet, this government knows it has a problem – and that the unions are enjoying quite a lot of public support. We must now drive home the point with more concerted actions.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

SUSPECTED VICTIMS OF NAZI EUTHANASIA FOUND IN AUSTRIA

A construction project excavation in the disused grounds of a psychiatric hospital in Hall, Austria revealed the remains of possibly hundreds of mentally and physically disabled people murdered by the Nazis between 1942 and 1945.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/suspected-victims-of-nazi-euthanasia-found-in-austria-2176117.html>

The ghosts from those dark pages of our history still haunt us today, and quite rightly. I don't want to forget the depths into which men plunged in order to pursue a wicked and twisted ideology.

Those murdered thousands may now only be a footnote in history, but they were once alive like us. They once had dreams, just like us; but, unlike us, their lives were stolen from them. Their futures became part of our history.

RIP all victims of man's inhumanity to man . . .

2012

SUNDAY, 20 MAY 2012

REMPLOY VS ACCESS TO WORK

On the Remploy page on Facebook someone stated that Access to Work no longer funded adaptations to workplaces. Let us not get mired down in propaganda, that is the way of this government and its attack-dog press. Therefore, stating that there is no government spending on Access to Work, or that A2W no longer assist in workplace adaptations, is not the case. This only applies to adaptations to new premises.

As a disabled person in work, I receive A2W for a support worker (for which A2W picks up the whole tab); when I began the job, around six months ago, I applied for a bespoke chair, which I now use (and for which A2W met 90% of the cost and my employer 10%); and I'm in the process of applying for a wheelchair hoist for my car.

Let's be clear about A2W. It is an excellent scheme that is in dire need of greater funding. Common sense, and prudence, should dictate that the government pump scores of millions into this scheme, as for every £1 invested they see a return of £1.41 through tax and NI contributions!

However, here lies the rub. Liz Sayce, in her review of disability employment support, praises Access to Work as the way forward, while consigning Remploy factories and residential training courses (RTC) to the dustbin of history. Using Sayce's figures, the combined government funding for both Remploy and RTCs adds up to over £80 million. Yet, the government has only announced an extra £15 million over three years to A2W. Investing in A2W could be carried out while keeping Remploy factories open. The two do not have to compete. Remploy factory subsidies are falling. Given the correct market impetus (the full exploitation of reserved contracts for supported factories and businesses) and a complete root and branch restructuring of Remploy's senior management corps and board of directors, could still allow Remploy to reduce its state subsidy. But, such major changes need time to show results.

So, as this government strips non-waged disabled people of their benefits, telling them that work is the solution to their being lifted from poverty, it shows just how committed it is by offering a measly £5 million extra per year – a paltry 6.25% that it will save by shutting down Remploy factories and closing RTC schemes. Hardly the actions of a government seriously looking to help anyone out of poverty.

SUNDAY, 8 JULY 2012

REMPLOY WORKERS VOTE TO STRIKE!

Remploy strike dates set, as ministers wield axe on 54 factories

Remploy workers faced with the dole queue are to stage two 24-hour strikes as the coalition gears up to close or sell off the 54 factories that provide employment for disabled workers.

Unite, the largest union in the country, announced today (5 July) that its members will stage the strikes on Thursday, 19 July and Thursday, 26 July. A continuous overtime ban starts on Thursday, 12 July.

Remploy workers, members of the Unite and GMB unions, voted by large margins to take industrial action. The workers are devastated by the coalition's plans and have voted to strike because – the proposed closure negotiations were 'a sham'; in protest at the intention to make disabled people compulsorily redundant for the first time at Remploy; and because the redundancy pay will be less than previous voluntary redundancies. Unite members voted 59.7 per cent in favour of strike action and 76.1 per cent voted in favour of industrial action short of a strike.

The GMB members voted 79.5 per cent in favour of industrial action, including strike action and 87 per cent for action short of strike action.

Unite's national officer for the not-for-profit sector, Sally Kosky, said: *"This vote for strike action demonstrates our members' disgust at the way they have been treated by the government's policies which are designed to throw them on the dole queue at a very difficult economic time."*

"Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith – the uncaring face of the coalition – has provoked this strike at Remploy by refusing to listen to the economic arguments. His decision is based on right-wing dogma."

"Our members are desperate to work in an environment that takes account of their disability and where they can make a valued contribution to society and pay their way."

Phil Davies, GMB national secretary, said: *"The government's intention to destroy thousands of disabled workers' jobs in Remploy has given rise to an overwhelming vote for strike action against the proposed closures of their 54 factories."*

"These closures are going ahead without any consideration of the feelings and needs of these workers and their families or their future job prospects. To close a factory that employs disabled people in the present economic climate is a sentence to life of unemployment and poverty."

Unite and the GMB have been campaigning to keep the Remploy factories open as viable businesses and cite the recent upbeat assessment of Remploy's prospects from Alan Hill, managing director, Remploy Enterprise Businesses, who wrote: "We have grown our sales by 12.2%, a fantastic achievement."

A total of 36 Remploy sites are due to close or be sold off in the near future, with the remaining 18 due to close or be sold off next year.

The 27 factories where Unite has members can be viewed on the link:

<http://www.unitetheunion.org/remploynotforsale>

TUESDAY, 14 AUGUST 2012

REMPLOY'S FINAL CHAPTER

Years ago I worked in the Remploy factory in Brixton. Tucked away off the main road a short distance from Brixton town centre it stood in its own yard, a 1960s build one-storey factory abutting a two-floor office building; much like any other light industrial unit in any of thousands of yards up and down the UK.

Indeed, the similarity didn't end there; for once you pushed open the factory doors you entered into a veritable hive of industry. Casting an eye around the open-plan factory you'd have seen several production lines employing 30 or 40 people; others sat or stood at individual work stations, carrying out tasks such as soldering, complex wiring operations and testing of delicate computer boards and cards.

Bells would sound, signalling break times to small groups of workers break. Off they'd traipse to a canteen at the far end of the shop floor, chatting to one another, some engaging in horse-play, laughing and calling out to mates across the factory divide.

This to-ing and fro-ing, hustle and bustle sound-tracked by the thrumming of tools, laughter and banter was the very theatre and music of industry.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

However, this was a Remploy factory and, while replicating the average light-industrial workplace found in any city, town or edge of town industrial estate anywhere in the UK, there was one difference . . . all the shop floor staff and many of the white coats, indeed, were disabled.

In 1945, Britain had experienced six long and hard years in a state of war; now she was ready for a welfare state; and so, Remploy was born – a company that employed disabled people giving them meaningful employment in a safe organised working environment.

From its first factory in 1945 at Bridgend, making violins, Remploy would over the years spread across Britain growing to over 10,000 factory employees in 84 sites.

So, what went wrong?

Thatcher and neo-liberalism are part of the problem – and so is a lack of understanding of Remploy and disabled workers' choice, especially by the Left, and in particular by the purists within the disability movement. Both contributed to the demise of Remploy factories.

Even six years ago when Europe eased public contract procurement regulations for supported employers, Remploy's board of directors sat on their hands. Instead of fighting for these contracts they made no effort, never bringing in more than around 20% of public contract work.

Then the axe came to drop, and four and a half years ago, to their everlasting shame, a Labour government began the mass closure of Remploy factories – 30 closed in March 2008.

A survey carried out, earlier this year, amongst the 2,500 Remploy workers who took redundancy in 2008 pointed to 85% of them no longer being in full-time employment. The class of 2012 can expect to fare far worse.

As an ex-Remploy worker and branch secretary (from 1996 to 2012) I have been involved with my branch and membership in struggles to keep factories open since 1999. In that time my comrades, from within and without Remploy, have tirelessly fought and supported the concept of disabled workers' choice.

In the last campaign, beginning in 2007 and ending in 2008, the trade unions threw all their political and organisational weight behind the Remploy action. Unite (still in its component Amicus and T&G state), the GMB and Community produced an alternative business plan; we embarked on a Remploy crusade, touring the country, Remploy factory site by factory site.

I criss-crossed Britain with other Unite branch activists attending rallies and demos in England, Scotland and Wales; yet, despite our efforts, the factories closed.

Four years on the war recommenced. This time the government went right to the heart of the established disability movement and handed a purse of silver to Liz Sayce, then the CEO of RADAR (an organisation along with others that had helped stab us in the back in 2007), to supply them with a report on disability employment support.

Sayce played up to the gallery, just as her paymasters expected. She condemned both Remploy and residential training courses as too costly while recommending Access to Work to the government.

What you won't find within the pages of Sayce's partial findings is the true feelings of thousands of Remploy workers who she chose to ignore; instead, she cited the views of the minority whose agenda chimed with her own.

Needless to say, Liz Sayce's reputation within the disability movement, as well as that of her new organisation (DRUK) who are still vociferously backing the government's closure programme, is much damaged. Fast forward to today. Despite a number of strikes across almost all Remploy factories; despite thousands of letters written to MPs, ministers, councillors and politicians of every stripe and stature by workers, their families, friends and supporters; despite bill-boards attacking this disgraceful action; despite a 100,000 signature petition handed into the PM; despite the double-dip recession with its attendant hardships of cuts and mass unemployment (most yet to happen); despite all these actions, this stony-hearted government, which seeks solace in its ideology, refuses to budge from destroying the jobs, hopes and aspirations of 1,518 disabled Remploy workers.

Comrades in Remploy, the fight goes on, as it must. Unite remains steadfastly behind your cause. If your factories close in the next few weeks it will not be from the want of effort from you and the trade unions, Unite, GMB and Community.

2013

MONDAY, 7 JANUARY 2013

WHAT HAVE THE UNIONS EVER DONE FOR REMPLOY?

Up until last autumn I was the branch secretary for the Remploy London factories, a position I held for some 16 years. During this entire period, I spent my time representing disabled workers in disciplinarys and grievances; I assisted with the application of social security benefits all the way through to appeal stage.

Over this period, I got to know Remploy workers in London and around the country very well. In times of strife and struggle our branch answered the call. When 13 years ago we needed bodies for a 24-hour vigil outside Parliament to stop a proposed closure of anything up to 16 factories, the 1971 Remploy branch sent along its members; a couple of us braved the freezing February weather staying out for the complete period.

Margaret Hodge, the minister for disabled people at the time, called the unions and company to a meeting a few days later where a moratorium on closures was imposed. The upshot of this was that a couple of sites did close, but their workforces were subsumed into local factories.

We were at the Emirates Stadium several years ago fighting for a new factory for the Holloway Remploy comrades displaced by the new Arsenal ground. When I say we, I mean the trade union movement. Hundreds of non-Remploy union activists turned up on that Saturday and helped get the message across to the Remploy board that they had a duty to spend the money received from the Gunners to re-house their employees.

Within weeks they had a replacement factory a couple of miles away – off Green Lanes, Finsbury Park. Without the sell-out trade unions this factory would have gone to the wall.

Further evidence of perfidious trade union action can be traced back to August 2007 when those backstabbing bastards from the union side of the Remploy consortium launched a nations-wide crusade to save the jobs of thousands of their members. Over a number of months, a coach made its way from Aberdeen to Penzance visiting every Remploy factory, and garnering support along the way. The crusade culminated at the Labour Party conference in Bournemouth, where thousands and thousands of trade unionists from around the UK and Ireland joined in to lend their voices to those of their Remploy comrades.

In addition to the crusade Remploy branches and factories in towns throughout England, Scotland and Wales organised their own rallies and demos throughout 2007 and 2008. I know as I travelled thousands of miles criss-crossing the countries from Stirling to Poole and Cardiff to Norwich joining thousands of other trade union activists in our fight to save the jobs of our disabled comrades.

Sadly, Labour did not listen; and the following year 30 factories closed. Of course, this made it easy for the Tories to come along a few years later and finish the job; and despite the Sayce Report that hammered home the last nails in the Remploy coffin, the trade union movement still brought the fight to the government, arranging lobbies in Parliament, setting up meetings of Friends of Remploy MPs to listen to Remploy workers' concerns. The 1971 branch held a public meeting with a top table full of Remploy workers past and present who gave heart-stirring testimonies of their working lives in Remploy; how they had fought every form of adversity before coming to work at Remploy; and how a sense of uselessness descended upon them as their factory gate slammed shut in 2008. One comrade solemnly admitted to having become suicidal such was his feeling of hopelessness for the future.

To say the unions let down Remploy is both a lie and a slur on the character of all the disabled trade unionists who fought until they could fight no longer against the forces of intransigent ideology.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

ATOS MEMBERS VOTE FOR ACTION

A recent pay offer was rejected by ATOS IT Services and ATOS Healthcare workers who balloted over 80 per cent support for strike action and over 90 per cent support for action short of strike.

Loath or love them, ATOS members have voted to support industrial action; it's a shame that such numbers do not resist the quota system they're operating. That system serves to impoverish hundreds of thousands of sick and disabled people while driving thousands of others to premature deaths.

It is beyond me why ATOS workers feel they need to comply with a flawed DWP system of assessment and the government's blatantly obvious policy of driving down numbers of benefits claimants, as in the case of ESA claimants being shoved onto JSA, a less generous benefit.

There should be no need for health care workers to slavishly obey diktats that order them to compromise their professional relationship with ill and disabled claimants. Doctors and other healthcare workers take a hippocratic oath which calls on them to uphold professional standards; to keep patients from harm and injustice.

There are also a number of codes of practice relevant to different disciplines within medicine. Again, these call for practitioners to put the health and wellbeing of the patient above other concerns.

Indeed, some practitioners adhere to their oath and codes of practice, in some cases resigning rather than going against their principles. Sadly, they are too few; and while these people should be celebrated for taking a principled stance against a flawed system, one that actually coerces its workforce to ignore ethics and pander to the bottom line, they are too few to move an intransigent DWP which is ideologically driven.

Proper union organisation is what is needed amongst the ATOS healthcare workers who carry out the assessments. A properly organised and politicised group of workers with a good rep structure in place would go some way to educating these workers; maybe opening their eyes as to the real class enemy.

However, the war against the mis-assessments, repetitive and unnecessary re-assessments and the awful toll in human misery they create can only be won when a government scraps the present system. Scraps the WCA and replaces it with an assessment which is transparent, fair and relevant to the claimant. Kicking out ATOS without first scrapping the WCA with a fit for purpose alternative will merely change the name of the hate figure.

MONDAY, 27 MAY 2013

DISABLED TRADE UNIONISTS AND DISABLED GRASS ROOTS CAMPAIGNERS BRING CENTRAL LONDON TO A STANDSTILL!

Last Wednesday evening, 22nd May, around 200 disability activists blocked the junction at Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street for over an hour in protest at this government's continued attacks on disabled people's benefits, welfare resources, and, indeed, in all too many cases, their very existence.



Earlier in the day, just a short distance away, a couple of hundred trade unionists were in attendance at the TUC's annual disabled workers' conference, where Sean McGovern, co-chair of the TUC DWC, set the mood for the event with a speech that told in stark terms this government's unremitting attack on our class, and especially the vicious lies and distortions it continued propagating at the expense of disabled people.

Finishing his address, McGovern stated that trade unionists must join with sisters and brothers within our communities, to send an unequivocal message to this government that disabled workers share the same struggle as unemployed sisters and brothers as well as those disabled who can't work.

The first few motions covered:

- Recruitment of disabled workers
- Defending the Welfare State and the rights of disabled people
- Protection of disability rights
- UN convention of the rights of people with disabilities
- Universal credit and SEN changes
- Changes to work choices programme

The debate around these issues was very lively. The delegates were sending out a clear message; and the message was: "We're not standing by and allowing this government to wreck our welfare state and kill thousands of us in the process!"

Straight after lunchtime, during which an excellent standing-room-only fringe meeting on 'Autism and neurodiversity in the workplace' took place chaired by Unite's Tom Butler, our first guest speaker of the afternoon, Francesca Martinez, took to the platform.

For those of you who with the misfortune of not knowing who Francesca is, well she's an actor and comedian with disabilities; whose material, while very funny, also has a political edge. Francesca is deeply involved in the disabled people's [WOW \(war on welfare\) petition](#).

Francesca told the conference that an "*attack on basic human rights*" was being perpetrated against disabled people by this government and added:

"People my age with so much to offer have been writing to me and expressing such worry over issues such as the closure of the independent living fund. A very common thing written to me is a stark choice between losing all their care and being isolated at home or being forced into institutions."

Ideology, not money, is behind the benefits' cuts; and they are aimed at those in our society who can least defend themselves.

Martinez received a standing ovation as she stated she'd be taking part in anti-austerity direct action and that *"those in power are not going to give in unless you force them to. That means making things uncomfortable. There is no other way things are going to change."*

Francesca finished by saying: *"It might take more than marching and protesting. It might take a national strike. I don't think change occurs because of polite pleading. I also support any action taken and I will be out there on the streets with you."*

With an international tour to start, Francesca left the hall to a standing ovation of tumultuous proportions. We liked her; we liked what she had to say; and, most importantly, we liked the fact that what she said to us needed saying!

A few motions later, and Andy Greene from Disabled People Against the Cuts (or as they're better known across the country, DPAC) came on to speak on how ordinary people were dealing with the cuts.

DPAC, though a relatively young organisation, has packed a lot into its short life. It wouldn't be amiss to say that this group of disabled people and their supporters have led the way in direct action against the austerity cuts and brutal way in which ATOS assess sick and disabled people for benefit; DPAC has carried the fight from the internet and public meetings onto the street and indeed into government offices.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

With an eloquence and determination, Andy's speech took hold of the conference; and when he appealed for trade union delegates to take direct action, they didn't take too much persuasion. Mandy Hudson, co-chair of the TUC disabled workers committee, called for support for action to which the majority agreed; with that she closed the conference early and we made our way to Tottenham Court Road.

At around 5pm a group of disabled protestors stopped on the crossing by the Dominion Theatre at the top end of Tottenham Court Road, and began a protest. The theme of the protest was the coming together of disabled trade unionists and disabled grassroots campaigners. Our aim was to show this government that we don't buy into their 'workers versus shirkers' propaganda; that whether we are disabled and in work or disabled and out of work, we are still one class; and this government's smashing of the welfare state and selling-off of the NHS is a fight we must all join.

The demo went quite smoothly. Cabbies and bus drivers seemed bemused by a bunch of crips asserting their authority on the streets. Indeed, the police merely spoke to several of us, individually; and when they discovered that we were indeed all called 'Spasticus' they stood back and allowed the protest to continue.

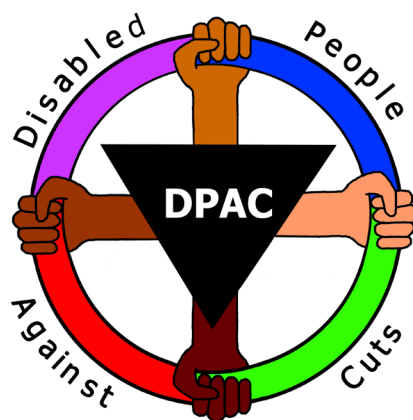
Wednesday's action was important for a number of reasons. First, it showed that disabled trade unionists aren't simply about attending countless committees where we, with the best intentions, vote on masses of motions that may or may not change the world. It also showed that direct action does have a place; and if the action is carried out in the correct way, that it's a powerful medium in which to engage with the wider public.

Had we remained ensconced in our conference last week, we'd have moved a few motions more quickly; and carried out very important work for our movement. Our conferences are a vital part of trade union democracy and, as such, we should endeavour to ensure they are well-attended and, as important, filled with issues that impact upon our members and the wider community. Our decision to take the conference to the streets was the correct decision; and I am proud to belong to a movement that sees the big picture and acts upon it.

WHAT HAS DPAC EVER DONE FOR US?

I had a sense of déjà vu reading this thread this morning. Since then, I've been to work in a direct payments department of a voluntary sector org; attended a workshop on the best way to deliver training to DP's PAs (some interesting takes on care packages); then fought my way home through the relentless droves of guerrilla cyclists and assorted ill-tempered drivers of Central London. Yes, I know...I get all the good gigs.

Anyway, back to the thread that had me thinking in parallel universes. Someone asked "What is DPAC doing to stop the cuts?", only to attract an equally aggressively put "give us a date for your planned revolution, and I'm sure those that are able will join you".



Over the past couple of years, I've had the pleasure and privilege of working alongside DPAC. Our relationship has been interesting, I think it's fair to say. We've clashed on a number of occasions, sometimes methodology getting in the way; at other times, though, we were heading to the top of the same mountain, we chose decidedly different paths to reach the summit.

Despite our differences, in the end it is that which we hold in common that unites us; and I hope to work alongside DPAC, and other progressive sister organisations as long as inequality and iniquity reign over my class.

So, what have the Romans ever done for . . . sorry, what is DPAC doing to stop the cuts?

To start with:

- They're getting off their arses and targeting our tormentors ATOS.
- Individual DPAC members are assisting disabled people in challenging false DWP assessments; and helping them win appeals.
- DPAC is challenging the DWP on rulings and the false information propagated by Iain Drunken-Smith.
- since their inception they've carried out a number of high-profile actions, such as occupying the DWP HQ and bringing London to a standstill on several occasions
- Offering solidarity to Remploy workers in struggle
- Putting disabled people and their issues in the spotlight in a way we've never before enjoyed.

For an outfit still in its infancy, compared with some of old timers of the Left movement, DPAC punches well above its weight. While the cuts may still be with us – after all governments with vicious ideologies are not defeated overnight – I maintain that without groups such as DPAC, Black Triangle, UK Uncut, as well as union influence from Unite and the TUC, this government would have pushed through much more vicious and faster cuts.

Fighting against any entrenched ideology, such as that displayed by this government, is a long-term struggle; and it would be a far harder struggle without the likes of DPAC taking the fight to the very heart of power.

So, DPAC, I offer you solidarity in the struggle and good luck with your London meeting on Saturday. We may not be quite ready for the revolution just yet. But I predict when we are, I'll be sitting shoulder to shoulder with good comrades from the trade union movement and DPAC!

2014

SUNDAY, 12 JANUARY 2014

BUILD OUR WAY BACK TO ECONOMIC RECOVERY

House building has this strange effect on the economy as a whole. Now for instance, if we were to initiate a programme of building 1 million houses in the UK this would take multitudes of building workers off the dole as well as boosting the employment of countless under-employed sparks, brickies, chippies and spreads. Thus, we'd have scores of thousands more workers contributing to the treasury and our flat-lining economy. But it doesn't end there.

When people move into new homes, they buy everything from paint for the ceilings to curtains; they have carpets laid; new kitchens installed; new cutlery and crockery is purchased to fill those new kitchen cupboards and drawers; they buy white electrical goods; they go to the DIY store for garden decking . . .

You get the picture. One million new houses would not only kick-start construction, but would act as a fillip to our almost moribund manufacturing and retail sectors. In addition to this it would put the brakes on the buy-to-rent speculator, thus bringing rents down, especially in the south, to more affordable levels.

If I can work this out then I'm certain that those in 'the know' are aware of this very simple piece of economic logic. Therefore, it's safe to come to the conclusion that this government is not interested in:

1. Reducing unemployment
2. Reducing under-employment
3. Creating meaningful jobs in construction
4. Creating decent jobs in manufacturing
5. Boosting employment in the retail sector
6. Controlling the runaway levels of rent in the private rented sector
7. Building more affordable social or council housing.

Instead, it looks suspiciously as though this government, like its predecessor, is willing to sacrifice jobs in

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

order to drag British workers back to the terms and conditions of the 1920s and 1930s in order that we can compete with the likes of China and India.

2015

TUESDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2016

REMPLOY'S DEMISE

Once I had a job working on the line
It was a living and everything was fine
Then Liz Sayce grabbed the Tory bob
Which threw thousands of us out of a job.
Working at Remploy meant I wasn't poor
And it kept the bad wolf away from my door
It put food on the table and paid the bills
As well as helping me to develop new skills.
Although the work didn't always stretch my mind
And sometimes it felt like more of a grind
Yet the camaraderie, the jokes, the craic
Made up for any humdrum, as I look back.
In wage talks our stewards knew their brief
Knowing any stitch-ups would end in grief
So all offers went first to the shop floor
If a rep bypassed us, he was shown the door.
Then MP Margaret Hodge decided to have a go
Describing Remploy as a workplace ghetto
A warehouse for crips to congregate
To while away their time, and to vegetate.
The very notion that we were segregated
In workhouse conditions now antiquated
Couldn't be further away from actual truth
Her comments made without the burden of proof.
If Remploy workers were late in the mornings
The management would issue written warnings;
Like other workers we grafted from eight to four
And on the bell we were straight out the door.
But it wasn't only MPs who wished our demise
The big charities also eyed up the Remploy prize
Damning factory life with lies and distortion
In the expectation of grubbing their portion.
When finally, the factories shut up shop
The craven charities were caught on the hop
As there was no pot of gold, no fat dividend
All they were left with was a reputation to mend.
This is, sadly, a tale of betrayal and of woe
For Remploy workers who felt the cold blow,
Abandoned by Iain Duncan-Smith's DWP
Brought about by Sayce's perfidious decree.
So if you ever come across the Judas Sayce
Remind her that she's a fucking disgrace
For consigning so many people to the dole
Just so she could achieve her selfish goal.

BREXIT BROKEN PROMISES

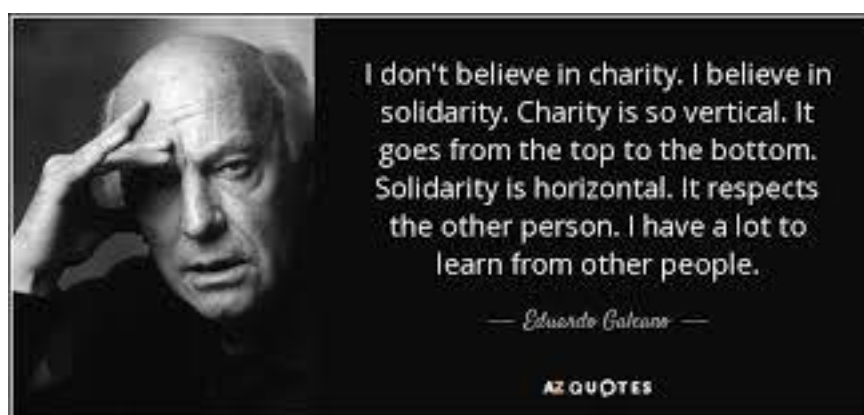
Listening to LBC's pro-Brexit Iain Dale made me laugh. The phone-in topic was on Owen Smith's vote-winning call for a second referendum on our position in Europe.



This topic drew all the Brexit voters out of the woodwork. As you'd expect, the usual complaints were voiced on how the 'Remain' side of the referendum told outrageous lies. And again, they echoed the same denial that the Brexit side ever committed itself to funding the NHS by using the £350 million that we send to the EU per week.

Despite supporting our remaining in the EU, I don't agree with Smith's re-running the referendum. However, I am angry with Brexit voters who on the one hand complain about the Remain dirty tricks campaign while accepting the lies told by Farage, Johnson and IDS. In fact, on the day after the ballot was run Farage was strenuously denying the £350 million promise while sitting in a studio with the coach in question on a giant screen behind him.

Create a national care service



After the Second World War disabled service personnel called for 'rights not charity'. This message has travelled down the passage of time. Today's disability campaigners hold to this demand while adding a more earthy 'piss on pity!' just in case those who stop their ears and close their minds to disabled people need a sharper message.

Just as I don't want to survive at the behest of some charitable organisation, who can switch funding off or on, I also expect the same in all other walks of life. Our kids shouldn't depend on charity to equip their classrooms; not one of us should be denied medical treatment while a hospital holds out a begging bowl for funding.

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by his family, friends and comrades

Similarly with social support and care. Those of us who have a need for such services should not have to call on the charity of family or friends. We demand that personalisation is a guarantee from government of adequate funding in this area.

Let's devote 2017 to lobbying for, to shouting and screaming for, to fighting and demonstrating in our millions for the establishment of a national care service. An NCS, affording care free at the point of need. A service not funded as a bolt-on through a council tax precept that will simply throw up another post-code lottery. No, a service funded through a national route of either national insurance or the general tax pot.

SUNDAY, 26 JUNE 2016

SCRAP THE CHANGES TO DISABLED CHILDREN'S TRANSPORT

Without even the courtesy of putting such an important issue out to consultation, Redbridge Council has decided to scrap its door-to-door minibus service for disabled people. In its place the council is going to introduce a 'pilot scheme' which will force disabled children who depend on door-to-door transport to and from school to instead go to a muster point on a main road to wait for the transport.

This is an outrageous decision by Redbridge Council. Expecting disabled children and their parents to travel to muster points to be picked up is a retrogressive measure.

Disabled people and their parents, carers and support workers face great difficulties on a daily basis. Adding to these difficulties by taking away the door-to-door service is to ignore the real needs of this group.

Struggling to get to muster points will add difficulty and danger to people's lives. How will people get to the points? While public transport is accessible, try accessing it during rush hour with a teenager in a specialised wheelchair. If driving, there is the problem of parking. Blue badge parking bays are not always available, especially where muster points are likely to be, on main roads. Then there's the issue of inclement weather. Door-to-door transport for disabled people is not a luxury. No, it is a necessity that enables disabled people to move forward rather than to continually find themselves being pushed further and further back.

FRIDAY, 26 AUGUST 2016

THE RUNNING-DOWN OF OUR NHS

Iain Dale, on LBC, is debating the pros and cons of privatising the NHS. Although he is showing his bias as pro privatisation.

Dale is also insisting that Theresa May is not going to privatise the NHS. No, his thesis states that if the Tories were going to privatise the NHS they would have done so under Thatcher or Major.

Iain Dale is, of course, being very disingenuous. He knows, as most of us know, that in order to fully privatise the NHS this government, and its predecessor coalition regime, have, and are, systematically running down the service.

More and more negative stories are coming out of the NHS, propagated by our capitalist-bought media. Basically, our NHS is being set up to fail. As failing services and debt increases so we'll see the media, in connivance with the government, calling for the private sector to come to the rescue.

This is exactly how Tories dealt with British Rail over 20 years ago. And look at our national rail system today. The subsidy is higher. Many services have been scrapped as unprofitable. Our trains are packed. Our trains are filthy.

MONDAY, 20 JUNE 2016

VOTE REMAIN

People on both sides of the EU referendum question are deluding themselves. Both sides of the argument have stooped to low and dirty tactics. How about introducing some honesty into the debate? The political right, as with the political left, has a foot in both camps. The difference, I hope, is that the political left is not predicating its argument on the lowest political denominator, as in this issue, immigration.

For the record I intend voting to remain within the EU. My reasons are akin to those I had for remaining within the Labour Party despite it being run by a bunch of progress Blairites with whom I shared no political views. Yet, like many others, I stood my ground within the party because I knew that I could not effect change from the outside.

Last autumn my resolve paid off. Jeremy Corbyn became leader of the Labour Party. (Before I'm shot down by those who don't feel Corbyn's success can change the party, that's another argument for another day.) The Labour Party once represented working people and poor people. The party once espoused social and socialist policies. With Corbyn at the helm there is a chance we can steer the Labour Party back to its roots. Similarly, the EU was once a body that supported and championed the rights of workers and poorer people.

Changing either of these organisations will not be easy. However, we have a greater chance to drive change within the Labour Party or EU, being a part of, rather than apart from them.

THE DEATH OF MUHAMMAD ALI

The greatest American of them all. Far more than a sportsman. Ali stood for humanity first and foremost. Someone who challenged authority. Why should he as a black man go and kill brown people in Vietnam at the behest of white men? Ali was a voice for the downtrodden in America. A man who challenged white supremacy whenever and wherever it was met by him. A great human being, RIP Muhammad Ali.

2017

MONDAY, 3 APRIL 2017

ASYLUM SEEKER SERIOUSLY ILL IN HOSPITAL

My thoughts are with the young Kurdish Iranian lad who was brutally attacked on Friday night, and his family and friends who must be going through hell.

The teenager was repeatedly beaten around the head and left unconscious by a gang in Croydon. He is now in hospital with a fractured skull and brain haemorrhage, in a serious but stable condition.

Reading this story transported me back 40-plus years, when I lay in a coma having suffered a fractured skull resulting in a brain haemorrhage. Like this young man I had been attacked by a gang and kicked in the head. Just as in my case, a few minutes of mindless violence has left another young person clinging on to life. As with me, I hope the youngster pulls through and can make a speedy recovery.

The other thing that disturbs me about this incident is the fact some 20 local people are reported to have witnessed the attack without coming to his assistance.

WEDNESDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2017

'AUSTERITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION' BOASTS A TORY HEALTH MINISTER

A Conservative health minister in the Commons has claimed that "austerity is the mother of invention". If this is the case then the Tories are the parents of poverty.

TUESDAY, 2 MAY 2017

CORBYN SOUGHT PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Ironically, the very person who insisted she would never speak to 'terrorists' did indeed negotiate with the IRA in 1981 at the time of the hunger strikes. Earlier than this, in 1972, Willie Whitelaw met with six representatives of the IRA.

Fast forward to 1998 and the then secretary of state for NI, Mo Mowlam, met with members of paramilitary organisations from both sides of the divide. And, as recently as 2008 in a bid to save the Good Friday Agreement Tony Blair offered to meet with masked IRA leaders.

So, despite Thatcher's political posturing, she did negotiate with, in her words, terrorists; as did her 'top' man in Ireland, Whitelaw. Yet we hear no cries of "terrorist supporter!" being levelled at them. Nor have Blair, Mowlam, or even John Major, who attended meetings with IRA leaders in the early 1990s, had pro-terrorist accusations directed at them.

Nine years on from Blair's attempts to ensure the Good Friday Agreement held, the nasty press and media are rolling out propaganda against the current Labour leader. The scum that poses as the British media are trying to incriminate Jeremy Corbyn. They are maintaining that because he spoke to pro Republicans and attended

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by his family, friends and comrades

meetings that called for Irish unity he was somehow a supporter of terrorism.

Of course, this is all part of the continuous smear campaign propagated against Corbyn since he became leader of the Labour Party. Our scab media will endeavour to ignore the progressive policies put forward by Corbyn and McDonnell; instead, they will rake over the cold ashes of yesterday's news in an attempt to spark the embers of reaction.

Please, don't be duped by the lies of our Tory-bought media. Corbyn, as with other politicians of the day, sought an end to the cycle of violence perpetrated by all sides in the Six Counties, and beyond. No, instead look to his positive policies on:

- Housing
- The NHS
- Social services
- Public transport
- Living wage
- State benefits
- Taxation
- Education, and
- Trade union rights

SUNDAY, 18 JUNE 2017

NOW WE KNOW THE IMPACT OF DEREGULATION – PEOPLE PERISHING UNNECESSARILY IN HORRENDOUS BLAZES

Brandon Lewis was the Tory housing minister in the Conservative/LibDem coalition. In 2014, as housing minister, he declined to require developers to install sprinklers. Instead, he told Parliament:

“We believe that it is the responsibility of the fire industry, rather than the Government, to market fire sprinkler systems effectively and to encourage their wider installation. The cost of fitting a fire sprinkler system may affect house building – something we want to encourage –so we must wait to see what impact that regulation has.”

Well, Mr Lewis, how does 58 lives sound, for openers? How do several hundred lives sound? Will that be impact enough?

WEDNESDAY, 8 NOVEMBER 2017

DIRECT PAYMENTS IS NOT A UNIVERSAL PANACEA

Local authorities and social workers enthusiastically sell the benefits of direct payments. Direct payments (DPs) allow disabled people to buy in their own care and support. This can be accomplished through engaging an agency to carry out the care and support. Or the service user could employ their own personal assistants. Social workers generally use the following three points to sell DPs to disabled people:

Flexibility: However, flexibility is not a universal panacea. First of all, define flexibility. When you try, you come up against the test of reasonableness. So, flexibility has to be negotiated. This negotiation can mean the DP user having to make big compromises with their PAs.

Choice: Yet, like so many things in life choice usually comes with a price tag attached. Therefore, the parameters of choice are governed by good old-fashioned economics.

Control: Arguably this should be the greatest advantage of DPs. Yet as with other determining factors such as flexibility and choice, control is heavily influenced by exterior forces.

The two factors that can make DPs an advantageous way of buying in care and support are:

1. Adequate means to support your needs, and
2. An ability to properly manage PAs.

Until care and support packages can offer adequate budgets and proper training funding to DP users, this means of caring and supporting disabled people will remain as care on the cheap.

There is also a downside for the PAs who deliver the care and support. This group of undervalued workers have usually to:

- Work several jobs to make up a weekly wage,
- Work unsociable hours, often without proper recompense,
- Go without a decent pension scheme,
- Go without an occupational sick pay scheme,
- Come out to clients at unsociable hours.

THURSDAY, 12 JANUARY 2017

MCCLUSKEY'S RECORD ON CORBYN

"Do you want a GS who wants to undermine democracy?" McCluskey didn't undermine democracy back in July 2015 when the executive backed Jeremy Corbyn for Labour Party leader.

"Someone who was forced to back Corbyn as LP leader after initially backing Burnham . . ." Yes, McCluskey did favour Burnham over Corbyn initially. However, as I've just stated, when the executive voted overwhelmingly for Corbyn, McCluskey accepted the democratic mandate.

Whoever McCluskey's original preference for leader was, he has backed Corbyn all the way since the executive made its stand. Last summer McCluskey attempted to act as honest broker to repair the damage caused by Watson and his wrecking crew.

On the point of strikes, McCluskey has not repudiated a single strike during his tenure of office. As for cosying up to management, can you substantiate this?

Attack McCluskey on record. Then tell us how Ian intends to lead the trade union movement.

Note – this was written during the election for Unite general secretary in 2017. Ian is Ian Allinson, one of the candidates at the election.

MONDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2017

SOME SMALL CRIMES NO LONGER INVESTIGATED BY OUR BROKEN POLICE FORCES

As the police are now so stretched for resources they will no longer be investigating small crimes. The question being asked, of course, is: "What constitutes a small crime?"

How about these, for starters?

- Billion pound fraud committed in the City of London?
- Ex-prime ministers, Tory grandees, and lords bugging children?
- Thousands of disabled people dying as a result of flawed health assessments?
- Politicians taking us to war on the say-so of doctored reports?
- Political parties cheating on election expenses thus getting an advantage over their opponents?
- MPs cheating on their expenses and hiding behind ignorance of the very rules they put in place?

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

TUESDAY, 3 JANUARY 2017

TEBBIT DRONING ON ABOUT DRONES

They're droning on about drones on LBC Radio. They're blathering away at the dangers of misusing these boys' toys. Apparently, they are permitted to fly up to a height of 120 metres in cities such as London. Iain Dale, in keeping with his true-blue Tory agenda, announced that he will be speaking to Lord Tebbit, an ex-airline pilot, on the dangers drones pose. On comes Tebbit and begins to lay into the misuses of drones. Aside from their intrusiveness, there are nutters who use them to interfere with commercial planes landing and taking off. Fair enough, Norm. I'm with you on that one. However, he reserved his real opprobrium for their use by terrorists.

With no irony intended, Tebbit went on to say that terrorists could load drones with explosive material and fly them into crowds of innocent civilians. Yes, Lord Tebbit, the US and UK armed forces have been successfully using drones to slaughter innocent people in Afghanistan and Iraq for years. Though I doubt these were the terrorists that you had in mind.

SUNDAY, 12 MARCH 2017

UNITE'S COMMUNITY BRANCHES

To Gail, Binky and all the rest of Unite's community members, I would like give you all a great big THANK YOU.

Thank you for your tireless work fighting the vicious austerity programme that is raining so much pain and misery upon our members, and disabled people generally.

Thank you for supporting community services and projects around the country; for helping to keep our vital services alive.

Thank you for turning up in numbers at industrial pickets to lend your support and solidarity.

You have become an integral part of Unite the union and I will continue working with and supporting Unite's community branches in whatever capacity I find myself.

2018

FRIDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER 2018

ACCESS TO WORK AWARD

Ode to Joy, Access to Work (A2W) has agreed to fund me for a further two years. The first two applications for A2W in my current job granted me the maximum three-year award; for some reason, my last two applications have awarded me A2W for a one-year and a two-year period. While two years' funding is preferable to a single year, the inconsistency of these awards is puzzling.

Last year I was not given a satisfactory explanation for my award dropping from three years to one year. However, as I was undergoing some mental health issues at the time, and weighing things up, I decided my MH was more important to me than the energy-sapping process of an appeal.

When I spoke to the A2W officer a few weeks ago she explained that as my records showed no evidence of me receiving DLA this could impact on the duration of the award. When I explained that I'd been in receipt of mobility allowance for 30 years and the HR DLA since 2000 the officer actually responded sceptically, stating that since A2W had no record of this then I might be mistaken.

WTF?

So, I contacted the DLA office and requested a proof of benefit letter which I sent on to the doubtful officer. Yet even armed with this information I still didn't manage to secure the maximum award. It appears that if you have the temerity to stand up to these bureaucrats and argue your corner they still manage to stitch you up.

The DWP is notorious for its 'go-ahead-we-don't-care' attitude to appeals. It is glaringly evident that the DWP has no regard whatsoever for the criminally wasteful mis-spending of its budget. Their philosophy seems to be – money is no object as long as it is not going to improve the lives of disabled people.

SUNDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2018

BOOKING AN ACCESSIBLE VENUE IS ONLY THE FIRST PART OF ENSURING FULL ACCESS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE.

Of course, if someone is trying to get past you in a tight space, moving 90° assuming a sideways profile and tucking in your tummy will probably afford the other person free passage.

This doesn't work for us wheelchair users. We can't make the profile of our machines smaller nor do we have parts that conveniently tuck away.

At last week's Dulwich and West Norwood CLP meeting I was met once again with access difficulties. Feelings of déjà vu predominate my mind when I arrive at almost every Labour Party event I attend.

This occasion on entering the meeting room I was confronted with several people who were standing along a wall blocking an already very narrow aisle. Eventually, the penny dropped and the people blocking ingress moved out of the way. However, by the time I had settled myself behind the last row of attendees, I noticed the people blocking the doorway and aisle resuming their former positions.

When I made a point of order the chair asked for space around the door and adjacent aisle. You'd have thought the chair had posed a really challenging task for these people to perform.

What part of "Could you please leave enough room for people including wheelchair users to move around" they couldn't process beats me.

The guest speaker then gave an excellent presentation on the issue of anti-Semitism. Sadly, the sound system decided to play up and she delivered her contribution without the benefit of a mic.

As the next guest speakers began a man walked into the room with an armful of chairs. He then positioned the chairs blocking me in. At that point, I realised I was wasting my time and I left.

I won't be attending future DAWN CLP meetings until I receive assurances that I can attend without becoming the focal point of events. Being the centre of attention as chairs and people move around is not my idea of fun. I simply want to attend meetings and take part in the proceedings under my own terms, not those set by the thoughtless actions of others.

CARNATION FOR A SONG

Dr Joseph Healy, my work colleague and friend, is a man of many and varied talents. Joseph is an Irishman of a certain age, deeply involved in LGBTQ politics as well as being a committed Socialist and devotee of the arts.

Last night I spent an hour or so watching and listening to a wonderful production at the Young Vic in which Joseph starred. 'Carnation for a Song' is a delightful production that distils the stories of 14 LGBTQ participants.

The set has the 14 players seated facing in various directions. Each holds a green carnation. The green carnation is significant as it is a plant that is not found naturally. The use of this flower in the LGBTQ culture may go back to Oscar Wilde who remarked in an 1889 essay that green was "in individuals . . . always a sign of a subtle artistic temperament . . ."

The stories were then told individually and collectively through song, poetry, dance, and readings. Each player gave the audience, through their chosen medium, their personal journey through life as a gay, lesbian or bisexual person.

A funny, sad, reflective, thought-provoking and highly entertaining evening. Thanks.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

ELIN ERSSON – A TRUE FIGHTER AGAINST INJUSTICE

When Elin Ersson knew that an Afghan man was being deported from Sweden to Afghanistan she bought a ticket on the same Gothenburg to Istanbul, then onto Kabul, flight.

Elin had evidence that if delivered to Kabul the man would most likely face death. Yet, despite this, a number on board the flight were rude towards her and her actions. An Englishman was particularly boorish and loudly grabbed Elin's phone.

However, a group of football supporters stood up in solidarity with Elin. Eventually Elin was successful as the Afghan man was taken off the flight.

What Elin did took guts. A truly selfless act. She was in danger both physically and emotionally. She had the power of the state and airline company against her. Sadly, she also had some disgruntled holidaymakers against her.

But she ignored all the external pressures and influences and spoke and stood up against tyranny. As long as we have the Elin Erssons of this world on our side, we will not be defeated.

Respect and Solidarity to and with Elin, and all the other Elins making a stand against oppression and oppressors.

LET'S CREATE A NATIONAL INDEPENDENT LIVING SUPPORT SERVICE

At yesterday's TUC general council both Tim Roach, general secretary (GS) of the GMB and Dave Prentice, Unison GS, spoke about issues concerning their members in the social care sector. Listening to their contributions led me to make an intervention.

I stated that some 160,000 disabled people with social care packages have fallen into debt. Some personal charges can be very high, indeed I once paid over £90 per week as a personal contribution towards my care package.

As care packages are cut to the bone, this becomes a double whammy as it hits both the service user who has a reduction in their care and support; and it reduces the working hours of the personal assistant/support worker/carer. Thus, creating precarious and unsustainable employment conditions.

Picking up on Dave Prentice's link between social care and the health service, I agreed that there were indeed crossovers between the two. However, I went on to say that most people's social care packages did not involve health interventions; and I warned of the dangers of the over-medicalisation of independent living.

Going on, I put forward the idea of creating a national care service, or as the disability movement has named it a National Independent Living Support Service. A stand-alone service working alongside the NHS and local authorities and at the point of delivery.

Finally, I called upon the TUC to arrange a seminar to discuss the crisis in social care for all users.

FRIDAY, 5 OCTOBER 2018

PICK UP YOUR WHEELCHAIR AND WALK I WAS ADVISED

For me, Labour Party branch meetings are mostly terra incognita. The underlying reason for my absences from these meetings is the general lack of access. In the first place, meetings don't begin until 7.30pm. As Thursday is a work day I am physically exhausted by 8-8.30pm, and running on fumes.

Yesterday evening as I was feeling unusually alert I decided to give the meeting a go. However, on arrival at the venue, I found a six-inch plus step barring my access.

On learning I was outside several of the branch members came outside to discover what was the issue. One kindly gentleman offered to carry me in. "No thanks," I replied. "I like to preserve my dignity when I can," I finished, tetchily.

Ideas such as laying a folded table down to act as a ramp or using a decidedly fragile looking whiteboard to serve the same purpose were proffered. It then transpired that the inner doorway wasn't wide enough to allow my wheelchair to pass.

After some very kind words and profuse apologies all round I departed, homeward bound.

Back at home, my PA told me that one man, out of earshot from me, wondered why I didn't get out of the chair and enter the building. I'm now wondering, is this stranger a modern-day Jesus? Why didn't he approach me and say: "Sean, get up, pick up your wheelchair and walk"?

STOP AND SCRAP UNIVERSAL CREDIT

For the past eight years disabled people have been subject to vicious attacks across all areas of our lives caused by the disproportionate impact of austerity measures and the dismantling of the welfare system. Social cuts have led to human catastrophe. This misery continues and will continue to spread misery and poverty as universal credit is more widely rolled out catching disabled people in its net.

The trade union movement, including the TUC, Unite the union and its community branches have all condemned UC, calling for its scrapping. Campaigning groups such as Disabled People Against Cuts as well as disabled people's organisations and grassroots disabled groups share one voice in their condemnation of what is properly viewed as a fatally-flawed system.

Given there could be an election next spring we must look to ensuring an incoming Labour government scraps UC. However, we must be ready to assist our government in working on a replacement system.

The TUC disabled workers committee, Unite the union and Disabled People Against Cuts would like to invite disabled people caught up in the universal credit net as well as disabled people who wish to contribute to seeking its replacement to a meeting on December 3rd, International Day of Disabled Persons 2018. The meeting will be held in the Wilson Room, Portcullis House, 1 Parliament St, Westminster, London SW1A 2JR from 2pm to 4pm.

THE ALABAMA 3, JOINED BY ROBERT CHANEY, AND THE GALWAY STREET CLUB IN ONE EVENING

Got invited to watch Alabama 3 tonight at my local jammin' joint, the Jamm. On arriving I was met by a stage full of young musicians that looked like a rag-tag bunch of buskers joined together to do a super gig. Which is pretty much what the Galway Street Club is, in that they are a group of street musicians who perform their music at gigs.

The band play an eclectic range of folk, rock, blues and ska frenetically juiced up on the sheer love of the thing they do . . . playing music while jiving. The energy they put into the music was complemented by a kaleidoscope of movement that left this member of the audience bombed out aurally and visually.

A band definitely worth getting to know; and I'll certainly look out for their future gigs here and in Ireland. The Alabama 3 unplugged, Larry Love, lead vocals, Be Atwell, vocals, the brilliant Nick Reynolds on harmonica and the exceptional Mark Sams, aka Rock Freebase, on bottleneck guitar, as ever beautiful.

However, I did feel there was something missing without the vocal contributions of either the beautifully-voiced Aurora or the amazing Zoe Devlin.

A surprise appearance by Floridian troubadour Robert Chaney went down very well as Robert and the band performed a rousing singalong of "You are My Sunshine".

Another great night out with Siobhan and our lovely friends.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

THURSDAY, 17 JANUARY 2019

CORBYN IS CORRECT IN NOT PUSHING FOR A PEOPLE'S VOTE ON BREXIT

Labour could potentially lose its Midlands and Northern heartlands, most of whom voted 'leave', if he pushes the clamour for a people's vote.

Jesus Christ, doesn't the fact that Brexit won against the odds mean anything to people? People in the poorest areas of the UK are fucked and have been continuously fucked under Thatcher, Major, Blair, Brown and Cameron.

Brexit, like the election of Trump in the US, is the reaction of people who feel disenfranchised from the centre. Arguing with someone who lives in precarious housing, with an equally precarious job, or none at all, who sees their kids going into schools in a failing education system, who have difficulty accessing health care due to the running down of our NHS, is pointless. They'll argue: "What the fuck else have I got to lose?"

And do you know what? I have every sympathy with sisters and brothers ground down by the system and ignored by those in authority.

Oh, by the way, I voted to remain and my views are unchanged, strengthened if anything.

WEDNESDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2019

THE CREATION OF A 'NATIONAL INDEPENDENT LIVING SUPPORT SERVICE'

Comrades, disabled people are being woefully failed by the state. Hundreds of thousands of disabled children, people of working age and elderly people miss out on vital social care and support.

For years social care has been something of a postcode lottery. Given that cash-strapped council social services are not meeting disabled people's needs, a new system needs to be established.

ROFA (Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance) is calling for a newly-elected Labour government to set up a 'national independent living support service'. Comrades, I'd be grateful if you could push the motion below to your union branches, union committees, trade councils and CLPs.

Conference, there is no doubt that social care is in crisis. A crisis brought about by years of Conservative governments' ideologically-driven austerity policies. Today we have a failing system unable to meet current need; and, certainly, unfit to respond to predicted future growth.

Healthcare and social care serve very different kinds of need and the overwhelming majority of disabled people who receive social care do not receive healthcare interventions through their packages. Thus, making the NHS responsible for social care which 'medicalises' the service. This is not the answer.

A national independent living support service is the way forward; a resource that best affords disabled people choice, control and independence.

Therefore, this conference calls upon a newly-elected Labour government to establish a national independent living support service (NILSS). A service that:

- Gives new universal right to independent living
- Is enshrined in law and delivered through a new national independent living service co-created between the government and disabled people,
- Is funded through general taxation and managed by central government,
- Is free at the point of need,
- Is led by disabled people and delivered locally in co-production with disabled people.

SUNDAY, 3 MARCH 2019

THE REALITY OF ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE LABOUR PARTY

I was a member of the London Labour Board when Ray Collins gave us a presentation of his review into Labour Party reform. At the time there was concern amongst the board members over the party's ability to control the proposed £3 members.

Even prior to the £3 membership there were reports from social media of Conservative and other right-leaning people stating that they would join as £3 members in order to cause trouble and sow confusion in the Labour ranks.

Therefore, when Jennie Formby looked into the 200 complaints lodged by Margaret Hodge it was unsurprising that only 10% of the number were Labour Party members.

No party, or individual, can fully police or control the actions of those whose only agenda is to create trouble. The figures Formby has published thus far do show that anti-Semitism exists in the Labour Party – and one anti-Semite, one racist, one misogynist, one disablist, one homophobe is, in each case, one too many.

However, the numbers of anti-Semites in the party do not reflect the levels of this scourge claimed by some Labour MPs. Nor do they warrant the scale of reporting by our, mostly, biased media.

As Labour Party general secretary, Jennie Formby is forging ahead and doing her level best to wipe out anti-Semitism within the Labour Party. It is a shame that the previous general secretary, Ian McNicol, wasn't as vigilant in dealing with reported cases of AS on his watch.

2020

FRIDAY, 14 FEBRUARY 2020

PIP PIP HURRAY

As a person who is prone to anxiety, someone who views life through a glass half empty, the whole PIP experience was very difficult for me. However, the assessment element of the process went very well. On the day Emma was present as my companion. Emma works for DASL as a benefits advisor, working with clients with a mental illness.

The assessor was very helpful, even assisting us with setting up the recording equipment (which Recovery in a Bin kindly loaned me – a big thank you to Lou). C, the assessor was polite, courteous, helpful and empathetic. The assessment lasted around 1 hour and 40 minutes, was very thorough, though personally invasive.

Last Friday I received a letter from the DWP informing me that my application for PIP had been successful. Following on from the PIP assessment on January 20th I found that I had scored 22 points on the daily living component of PIP and 12 points on the mobility section.

Very importantly, I received an ongoing award. This means I won't be reviewed for 10 years; and then, apparently, this will be a 'light touch' process.

Of course, I am relieved, and thankful that the process is now behind me – for a decade anyway. Yet, though personally relieved I still have many misgivings with PIP itself and more particularly, the process. Therefore, I shall continue campaigning against this awfully flawed policy, fighting to get a fairer and transparent system put in place.

Finally, I'd like to thank Emma, my PAs and GP for their supporting letters, Age UK and the people who read over my submission prior to making the application.

Very finally, I'd like to thank the assessor for carrying out the PIP process in the way it should be carried out.

REMEMBERING SEAN McGOVERN

by his family, friends and comrades

NET THE MINNOWS: BUT ALSO GO AFTER THE WHALES

Oh dear, what a rogues' gallery of ne'er-do-wells, mountebanks, cutpurses, blaggards and rascals that the scum press have dug up for our delectation.

Exchequer secretary David Gauke, said: *"The government is absolutely committed to tackling tax evasion and fraud.*

"These criminals have collectively cost the taxpayer over £765m and HMRC will pursue them relentlessly."

Quite right to set up a hue and cry against this assorted bunch of ciggy smugglers, illegal baccy producers, rum runners and allied trades. What sort of a country are we that allows such flagrant criminality to flourish without the full weight of the law to come crashing down to smash it from existence?

Well, we're the sort of hypercritical, two-faced, duplicitous, class-ridden shit house of a country where the scum press in connivance with a scummier government appoints itself judge, jury and executioner when dealing with common criminals such as the twenty exposed in papers today; yet, this same shower of self-important bumptious disgraces to the press fail to raise their voices with quite the same indignation when presented with the real tax cheats and frauds that cost this country not a poxy £¾ of a billion, but somewhere in the region of £120 billion every year.

So, scum press of the UK, fuck the small fry. Why don't you expose the big boys? The rats that deprive our kids of a decent education; the scum that cause our hospitals to close; the filth who are to blame for disabled and elderly people being denied proper care.

Why not shame:

Philip Green for dodging personal tax bills of almost £300 million?

Vodafone who were let off a whopping bill of £4.8 billion?

George Osborne who has the audacity to smash our Welfare State on the grounds of deficit while he dodges £1.6 million in personal taxes?

Barclay's Bank who were ordered to pay HMRC over £500 million in avoided taxes?

The PM himself, whose own father was one of the first to use 'off-shoring' to cheat on his taxes. Indeed, that's where Cameron's own wealth stems from.

Sure, go after the 20 they have in their sights. But, don't take the piss and leave the big fish to swim safely to their off-shore tax havens.

This booklet is online at:

<https://markwritcouk.files.wordpress.com/2022/03/sean-mcgobern-booklet-aq-76p-2.pdf>

Unite Education has published a series of booklets on its heroes past and present.

They can be downloaded for free and copies are also available from Mark Metcalf who has written and compiled the works.

metcalfmc@outlook.com 07392 852561 Mark is a member of the NUJ and the Football Writers' Association.

Tom Jones – a fighter for freedom and working people

<https://markwritcouk.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/tom-jones-booklet11-19899.pdf>

Mohammad Taj – Steering from the front

<https://markwritcouk.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/6328dpmt2018-taj-booklet-web.pdf>

The Great Dock Strike of 1889

<https://markwritcouk.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/the-great-dock-strike-of-1889-web-booklet11-23272.pdf>

Benny Rothman – a fighter for the right to roam, workers' rights and socialism

<https://markwritcouk.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/6328-benny-rothman.pdf>

Julia Varley – trade union organiser and a fighter for women's rights

<https://markwritcouk.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/6328-julia-varley-booklet.pdf>

Tony Hall: trade unionist, anti- racist and radical cartoonist

<https://markwritcouk.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/6328-tony-hall-booklet-2020.pdf>

Betty Gallacher – standing up for all workers

<https://markwritcouk.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/betty-gallacher-booklet-2020-v4.pdf>

Betty Tebbs – a radical working class hero

<https://markwritcouk.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/6328-betty-tebbs-web.pdf>

Stanley Taggart: an ordinary man who helped make it an extraordinary day

<https://markwritcouk.files.wordpress.com/2021/08/stanley-taggart-book-final.pdf>

Edward McHugh – radical trade unionist, labour movement activist, social reformer and land rights

<https://markwritcouk.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/edward-mchugh-booklet-1.pdf>

Ellen Strange -a moorland murder mystery explained

<https://markwrite.co.uk/2018/09/12/ellen-strange-booklet/>

Great Yarmouth Dockers

<https://markwritcouk.files.wordpress.com/2022/01/great-yarmouth-dockers.pdf>

“Not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay” – the 1926 Miners' Lock Out and General Strike

[“Not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay” – the 1926 Miners' Lock Out and General Strike](#)

See also the following documentary films on Edward McHugh, Ellen Strange and James Alwyn

Edward McHugh, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4A7AOlhHxE>

NO PASARAN – A tribute to James Alwyn <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f435WHWcqlU>

Ellen Strange: the Light that Still Burns <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPMaOEroepU>

Plus Bittersweet Brexit on Vimeo

ORAL HISTORY AND THE UNITE PODCAST SERIES

<https://open.spotify.com/show/7BqkJOUUnnIC1edzdz0Jv37>

[John Smith \(1932 - 2021\) - The decline of the docks. by Unite Oral History \(anchor.fm\)](#)



Published 2022

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