

nipsa Reports

SPECIAL ISSUE

Annual
Delegate
Conference
2026

INSIDE: 13 PAGES OF CONFERENCE COVERAGE & PICTURES

WINNING FOR WORKERS AND BUILDING ON OUR SUCCESS



Bieldin Public Services
Heftin' Waarkers in the Public Airt

Protecting Public Services
Supporting Public Servants

Ag Cosaint Seirbhísí Poiblí
Ag Tacú le Seirbhísigh Phoiblí

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS



Standing strong and standing firm

Addressing ADC, Tanya Killen reflected on the immense challenges faced by the union during her three-year term as president. She said that NIPSA members “stood strong and stood firm” despite the continued erosion of public services and the decline in living standards.

Thanking “every member and activist”, Tanya called them “the backbone of this union conference”.

Workers did not create austerity or inequality or underfunding, she noted, but are “apparently expected to quietly pay for it all”.

Describing such choices as “political”, she pointed out that public services can’t function on “yearly crisis management” and “emergency funding arrangements”.

Warning that budget instability had very real human consequences, she told delegates: “There is nothing responsible about balancing budgets on the backs of workers. There’s nothing sustainable about starving health, education, and public services of investment, while demand rises year after year. And there is certainly nothing inevitable about poverty, staffing shortages, and deteriorating services in one of the wealthiest societies in the world.”

Tanya pointed out that Stormont ministers spoke of financial pressures as if they were “some natural disaster” rather than a consequence of a political choice “to protect the rich and maintain an unequal system”.

“And let us be clear, a minimum

wage that keeps people in poverty is not justice. A pay rise below inflation is not a pay rise. Warm words about valuing public sector workers mean absolutely nothing when workers are relying on food banks or drowning in debt.”

These were political choices, she suggested, and NIPSA’s response must in turn be political but “not party political in the narrow sense”.

“This is why NIPSA must continue to stand proudly on the socialist and militant traditions of the labour movement, because socialism means putting people before profit.

Solidarity

“It means believing that wealth belongs to those who create it. It means believing that healthcare, housing, education, and public services are rights, not commodities. And it means believing in equality, solidarity, and collective responsibility.”

Turning to victories in recent disputes, Tanya said members from every sector of the union had shown “courage, determination, and solidarity”, and as a result the union had continued to grow.

“Our membership has increased because workers understand the importance of collective organisation. Workers know that when they stand alone they are vulnerable, but standing together we are powerful.”

Thanking the NIPSA HQ staff for “the advice, the representation, the countless unseen tasks that keep the union moving”, Tanya singled out Donna, the cleaner at Harkin House

who is set to retire for particular mention, thanking her for her “hard work, thoughtfulness and kindness over the years”.

Turning to another retirement later this year – that of the current general secretary – she paid tribute to Carmel’s leadership, predicting that she would leave “a lasting mark on our union”.

Pointing out that Carmel had taken on the role at a very demanding time following years of austerity, pay restraint, attacks on public services and the pandemic, she told conference: “Our union did not retreat into caution or accept decline as inevitable. Instead, under Carmel’s leadership, NIPSA stood firm in defence of workers and public services, and we remained a strong, visible, vibrant and determined voice for workers.”

In fact, under Carmel’s tenure, the union had become a stronger voice not only on workplace issues, but on equality, anti-racism and anti-sectarianism, public services, workers’ rights, and international solidarity.

Conference was told that Carmel’s legacy was evident “in the thousands of workers who found representation, protection, and collective strength through the union during her leadership”.

Tanya continued: “We thank Carmel not only for her years of service, but for her courage, determination, and unwavering commitment to socialism, solidarity, and the organised strength of the working

class. Her contribution to NIPSA and to the wider trade union movement will endure long beyond her time as general secretary.”

There was standing ovation as delegates stood to mark their appreciation of Carmel’s contribution to the union.

Tanya cautioned that the election of the next general secretary is “not simply an administrative change” or “a ceremonial role” but described it as “a defining moment for the future of the union”.

She asked conference delegates to consider carefully the attributes of candidates for the role, looking at their values, experience and commitment.

Tanya insisted that NIPSA needed leadership “that will continue building a strong democratic campaigning and militant union rooted firmly in solidarity and working-class politics”.

Passive leadership was not what workers needed nor “caution dressed up as pragmatism”, she said.

Instead what is required is leadership that is “experienced, principled, and rooted in the socialist tradition of our movement”, adding that members needed “someone that has stood alongside them – not observed from a distance”.

Tanya also took the opportunity to welcome incoming president Paul Dale who she said brings “years of experience and leadership” as well as a “calm presence” and “a sharp wit” to the role.



We keep going from strength to strength

Presenting the 2025 Annual Report, General Secretary Carmel Gates said she was proud to report "another hugely successful year" for NIPSA and to tell conference the union was "in the best shape it's ever been".

"We just keep going from strength to strength. Looking around the faces – at you fighters – who are doing such a wonderful job for NIPSA, you're never going to get complacent, you're going to keep doing what you need to do."

Reminding delegates of the 6% pay award for civil servants in August 2025, Carmel noted that the pay year for civil servants had also been changed and that another pay award – describing it as "something to look forward to" – was in the offing.

In health, she said the union had reason "to congratulate ourselves" over "small wins... not just to maintain parity, but to beat parity and [to] have parity plus". And in particular Carmel singled out the "entirely selfless" actions carried out by social workers in family and childcare services: "We stood on picket lines. We stormed a board meeting in the Southern Trust, and demanded that they listen to us."

Those "forthright and a bit bolshy" actions had, she added, led to the employment of more social workers "at a time... [when] they were telling us there was just no money".

Carmel also congratulated the GLL workers on a "tremendous success" in securing a 14.5% pay rise, thanking "those who fought in that struggle, those who supported it, those who stood on the picket lines".

Conference was told that NIPSA had carried out "essential work", through its lawyers, winning "hundreds of thousands of pounds for members [in personal cases] by challenging the unfairness of employers in the workplace".

The union had defended public services, opposed outsourcing, and supported campaigns to keep local hospitals open. She told delegates: "NIPSA is not just sitting in committee rooms, we

are not just a General Council or a Departmental Committee or a Civil Service Executive. We are actually taking seriously all of the work that makes our society a better society."

NIPSA had continued its strong advocacy on equality, anti-racism, and support for vulnerable groups. "We have fought alongside Disabled People Against the Cuts on changes to PIPs. We are also fighting [alongside them] for free public transport [for disabled people]."

Carmel spoke of the extent of violence against women and girls in Northern Ireland describing the 30 murders since 2020 as a "gut-wrenching statistic" and an indicator of "how violent our society has become".

She also pointed out that NIPSA was putting "strong pressure" on the NI Assembly on LGBTQI issues but noted that while a lot of work had been carried on the equality agenda "there is still a lot to do".

Union democracy

Turning to the Good Jobs Bill, Carmel said that while it would not deliver "all the rights workers deserved" particularly in rolling back Thatcher's anti-union legislation, it was a step in the right direction – in terms of bringing in electronic balloting to bolster union democracy.

"It's [not] going to do away with the exploitation completely, but some of the exploitation that workers face in precarious jobs and zero-hour contracts. It's going to force employers to give [their employees] access to trade unions. It is a crime in this day and age [to] have workers prevented from joining unions by employers who want to continue to exploit them."

NIPSA had been "unapologetically" at the forefront in fighting the scourge of racism over the past year. Carmel said the union was "working hard to challenge the things that give rise to racism – poverty, desperation and division" and point people in the right direction to where the actual blame lies.

She continued: "People say to us, 'I'm not a racist'... [but] the fact that their services have disappeared, the fact they can't get access the benefits or services they need... drives them to point the finger in the wrong direction. So we've been working very hard to make sure that they start pointing the finger in the right direction... [to] the system that we live under that keeps people in poverty."

On the setting of a budget at the Assembly, Carmel warned conference that if it was "agreed as it is", it would lead to immediate cuts to services. She said NIPSA's advice to MLAs was not to agree a budget if it means the implementation of cuts. "We're asking our politicians to stand with us and say we need enough money to fund services, so the workers don't have to scrape around for the scraps and don't have to put up with services that are not up to par."

Carmel said it was clear there was global turmoil with an "arch capitalist" in the White House who saw the world in terms of "greed and profit and money", and suggested he had "no compassion" and "no understanding of humanity". Unfortunately, she added: "We can only expect that it's going to get worse before it gets better."

On a more upbeat note, Carmel flagged up the increase in NIPSA membership to 45,000, and she suggested that this was because of NIPSA's reputation of "getting stuff done".

"The reason people are now joining is they see unions doing things, and not just doing things by winning personal cases, but being out in protests, being on picket lines. It's a myth that people leave a union because they don't want to go on strike. People join a union when they see people on picket lines because they say 'They're sticking up for me, they're fighting for me, I'll join'."

Carmel also outlined for conference exciting plans for the launch of a new CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system and new website to build and enhance membership services.

Pay and Pensions

Deputy General Secretary **Maria Morgan**, moving **Motion 1**, on behalf of General Council, highlighted NIPSA's continued success in placing public sector pay and members' living standards at the centre of the union's political and industrial agenda.

She told delegates this focus had delivered meaningful gains on pay and demonstrated the power of collective action.

Pointing out that though such successes had helped close the gap on pay erosion, there were still members struggling to meet basic living costs, a situation she labeled as a "continued injustice".

Insisting that pay justice "must start with those at the bottom", Maria vowed NIPSA would "ensure that no worker is left behind" and told conference the union "is not afraid to fight for what members are due".

She called for a co-ordinated campaign strategy – with industrial, legal, political as well as public campaigning elements – because "that is what has been required in the past to deliver [success], and that's what we will do again moving forward".

Maria added the union would use "all available levers", including "strategic and targeted industrial action" where needed and when necessary.

NIPSA would also deploy legal challenges on pay injustice and inequality as well as political engagement to fight for needs-based budgets. *Motion carried.*



Motion 1 Deputy General Secretary Maria Morgan



ADC stands in silence to remember comrades who have passed in the last year



Motion 4 Breandan Mulholland

Protecting Public Services 1

Breandan Mulholland (General Council), moving **Motion 4**, emphasising the gains made in the aftermath of the 2024 public sector strike, pointed out that much work had been carried out – lobbying politicians, media engagement, putting up banners, forging links with community groups – in advance of the January 18th stoppage.

He said NIPSA had insisted that members "would not be left behind in terms of pay" and that services in Northern Ireland would be properly funded.

The strike, involving 16 unions, had changed the discussion "from Orange and Green issues" to "issues about pay and public services and how they should be paid for".

Breandan said part of the settlement had seen nearly a billion pounds being funnelled into public sector pay and services with a recognition that the Barnett formula "did not work".

With the two-year settlement now coming to an end, there was the "crazy situation" that a budget for Northern Ireland has not yet



been agreed. He told delegates: "We still do not have a budget, but if that goes through without the Barnett formula being changed, we will end up under pressure for pay and for public services. We need to learn the lesson of two years ago and never forget it."

Damian Maguire (Branch 730), in support, warned delegates that there is a "tsunami of cuts coming". He flagged up a £700m deficit in Health and Social Care and said NIPSA "had to be ready

for this". He continued: "We need to take this forward because this is a political issue as far as we are concerned in how this is going to impact on our families and on ourselves and across every facet of the society across Northern Ireland." *Motion carried.*

Organisation & Administration 1

Gerry Largey (Branch 730), moving **Motion 7**, spoke about the

"increasing relevance" of Action Short of Strike Action (ASOSA) to members. He told delegates that "if applied confidently and with the support of the union", it can produce "real results" in workplaces.

While recognising that strike action remained the "engine of the trade union movement", Gerry called for a "targeted, union-wide education and empowerment campaign" on ASOSA.

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Motion 7 Gerry Largey

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As chair of the Belfast HSC Trust NIPSA branch, he said he felt pride in the level of commitment shown by his colleagues.

"This union has supported members who work in all arts and parts of an organisation that has 170 locations. People who are often not in workplaces where there is an active NIPSA rep, but who have had the courage to look the employer in the eye and say, 'That work's not my work. There is nobody here to do it, and we are not doing it'.

Marty McKee (General Council) said it was important the union used all weapons at its disposal in a "strategic, intelligent, cohesive" way. He said ASOSA had sometimes been seen as the "ugly sister" in the "arsenal of tactics" but if used "intelligently and coherently" it is a "powerful battering ram" in the "industrial action battlefield". *Motion carried.*

Public Policy 1

Colm Morgan (General Council), moving **Motion 17**, told conference that "racist scapegoating and far-right narratives" blaming migrant workers and minorities for "rising homelessness, unaffordable rents, and long waiting lists" were on the increase.

Pointing out that these arguments "are designed to divide workers while those responsible for austerity and inequality escape scrutiny", he continued: "Racism and sectarianism are used to weaken working-class unity and protect a system that prioritises profit. The far right must continue to be confronted and defeated by a confident, organised trade union movement. NIPSA must lead in uniting workers to fight for a better future."

Colm called on the union to build on its anti-racism organising through "workplace education and visible campaigning" to confront the far right and to challenge "low pay and the cost-of-living crisis... clearly stating

NIPSA REPORTS

Uniting to find a way out of the cul-de-sac of capitalism

Guest speaker Tony Saunois, from the Committee for a Workers' International, spoke about the global challenges faced by trade unionists and working people.

He pointed out that a "period of intense conflict and polarisation" was "unfolding" on every continent and that working people and the poor were paying the price. "Global capitalism" had, he said, plunged the world into an "unprecedented international crisis".

A war "of a genocidal character" is being fought in Palestine along with the ongoing "meat-grinder" of the Ukraine. Added to this is the extreme concentration of wealth among the elite, coupled with the escalation of military expenditure to nearly \$3 trillion. "We're in an era of war, the likes of which we've not seen for generations," conference was told.

And in response it was crucial for workers of the world to unite to find a way out of the "cul-de-sac" of this "global capitalist system". A united working class is the only force that can find "a way out of the horrors that are now facing humankind".

He told delegates: 'The top 1% of the population... have the same wealth as 48% of humankind that exists on the rest of the planet. Boil it down a little bit further, according to Oxfam, the top 0.001% – that's 56,000 people – have three times as much as the bottom 10% of the



GUEST SPEAKER

population. It's an obscenity."

Tony called for workers to unite globally and to transform society "for a socialist planned economy".

Slamming the hypocrisy of the "masters of the universe" who "repudiate and ridicule" such an idea and claim planning doesn't work, Tony asked: "Don't they plan? Don't the big corporations plan their production, their supply chains, how they

distribute the goods, how they stock their supermarket sales? All of that's planned by them.

"There's one crucial difference, though, they plan it for profit – for the shareholders, for the major owners. We will plan it democratically with the involvement of working people around the world – for the benefit of all humankind, not for the profit of a few."



Motion 17 Colm Morgan

that these crises are caused by capitalism and not by our brothers and sisters [from minority communities]."

In support, **Brian Mageean** (Branch 96) told delegates: "The far right, in all its manifestations, is evil. Their insidious actions are to be condemned and protested against at all times. We must campaign against the scourge of racism."

First-time speaker **Thérèse McKenna** (Branch 516) said this was not "an imagined or exaggerated threat" and went on to detail for delegates some of the key figures organising on the far right locally.

She warned that the far right were "working strategically... gaining pace... and capturing hearts and minds" across Northern Ireland.

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From page 5

"We need to organise against them, and I would appeal to everybody to use the tools that they have [to confront the far right]... and for everybody to unite and resist." *Motion carried.*

Tina Creaney (General Council), moving **Emergency Motion 18**, spoke about the "worrying findings" of the independent review by Dr Jan Melia exposing "institutional misogyny" in the PSNI's handling of the death of 21-year-old show jumper Katie Simpson, and which identified the need for "an urgent cultural shift" within the organisation.

She told delegates the report found that "when police endorsed misogyny, as in Katie's murder, the risk to women escalates".

Claiming the same approach is seen throughout the whole judiciary both in Northern Ireland and across the UK, Tina said: "Boys spared jail, just because the judge didn't want to ruin their futures, never mind the survivors... A woman reporting a threat to her life told after six hours that no officers were available..." Making a reference to the viral social media thought experiment about whether a woman feels safer alone in the woods with a bear or a random man, she told conference: "That's why we pick the bear."

Claiming the difference is "male privilege", she said women on the other hand had to live with "vigilance, calculation, and fear".

Pointing out that the community and voluntary sector had seen a further 69% cut in funding, this had impacted on the very organisations that provide "support for women in crisis,



Emergency Motion 18 Tina Creaney



Motion 17 Thérèse McKenna



In her Financial Report Honorary Treasurer Jane Scott echoed the upbeat assessment of the union's finances given earlier by General Secretary Carmel Gates as part of her Annual Report address to conference. Jane stated that NIPSA's robust finances were a direct result of the active campaigning prowess of the union, which attracted new members and boosted membership – an increase driven by success after success on the ground. She was pleased to report to delegates that NIPSA's finances and its pension are in their healthiest ever state.

challenge harmful attitudes, and hold systems to account".

Such cuts undermined any serious commitment by the NI Assembly to end violence against women and girls, she claimed, and called for misogyny to be challenged "across the institutions".

And Tina urged men also to challenge such behaviours: "Call it out at home, call it out in the pub, in the workplace, in the union committees. Women, girls, your mothers, your sisters, your daughters, your partners deserve more. We deserve safety, dignity, respect, and we deserve to live free from fear, harassment, abuse, and murder."

In support, **Mark Gibson** (Branch 117) said: "This society

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Motion 17 Brian Mageean



Motion 39 Damian McErlean



Motion 26 Kevin Kelly

NIPSA REPORTS



Emergency Motion 18 Kate Tyrell



Emergency Motion 18 Mark Gibson



Emergency Motion 24 G5 Carmel Gates
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and the way it treats and thinks about women is broken. Make no doubt about it, it's broken, it's shameful. And everybody who doesn't call it out, shame on you."

Kate Tyrrell (Branch 51) outlined for conference the grim statistics relating to domestic abuse crimes and homicides in Northern Ireland

She told delegates: "31 women

have died since 2021. Please recognise that these figures represent recorded incidents only, and are unlikely to reflect the full extent of harm experienced within our communities."

Kate, who works for the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, said: "Behind every statistic is a victim, a family, children living in fear, and communities left dealing with devastating consequences of

violence in their homes."

Turning to the issue of dealing with perpetrators of domestic abuse, she continued: "We need these individuals to address the causes of their behaviour. [If not] then nothing changes. We simply create a revolving door where individuals are imprisoned, released, and then returned to the same pattern of behaviour, because the underlying issues remain untreated and

unresolved." *Motion carried.*

Protecting Public Services 2

General Secretary **Carmel Gates**, moving **Emergency Motion 24** on behalf of the General Council, told conference that Northern Ireland – unlike Scotland and Wales – is not given enough money by central government to fund its services "at its level of need".

Treasury officials had also come to this conclusion after conducting an "open book session" to look into the issue – though their suggested solutions were to cut back the Civil Service, end pay parity and introduce water charges.

Carmel said these "smart" officials made assumptions based on "an ignorance of this place" and failed to understand that the reason why the Civil Service in Northern Ireland is larger than elsewhere in the UK is because it does work that is normally carried out by councils across the water.

She told delegates that NIPSA's advice to local politicians – who all agree that NI is not funded as it should be – was straightforward: "We are not funded to need – if Treasury doesn't give us what we need, then overspend."

Pointing out that this was the centenary year of the 1926 General Strike, she cited the example of the 2024 "partial general strike" [in Northern Ireland].

"The action that we took – instigated by NIPSA and Unison – brought billions extra into the economy."

Carmel continued: "The reason this emergency motion is on the agenda is to get your agreement that if we have to, we take to the streets again. We will not accept cuts, we will not accept job losses, we will not accept services that are inferior. We demand that we get what we deserve. We need a budget based on need, and we'll fight till we get it." *Motion carried.*

Public Policy 2

Joan Feeney (Branch 733), moving **Motion 26**, spoke about the rising levels of violence and aggression experienced by staff in the public service.

"The patterns are all the same, the numbers are increasing," she said. "The incidents are becoming more severe, and the support systems meant to protect workers are not keeping up."

There were 72,000 cases of verbal or physical assault over the last five years in the health sector, while in the Civil Service 18% of staff had reported verbal abuse or intimidation from members of the public. Joan told conference: "These are not just statistics,



ADC shows its appreciation with a standing ovation for General Secretary Carmel Gates who is retiring later this year

From page 7

these are our colleagues, our members. These workers are going home shaken, injured, and often traumatised. These workers feel unsupported, unheard, and often blamed. And let me be clear – violence is not part of anybody's job."

She said protecting staff was a "fundamental duty" of every employer: "When workers are safe, services are safe. When workers are protected, services are stronger."

William Welsh (Branch 47) warned that this worrying trend was "not abstract and not theoretical" and that "it's happening now and affecting our members".

Speaking of his own experience in the Court Service, he said the working environment was "becoming more volatile, more unpredictable, and at times more dangerous".

He continued: "We are seeing offenders becoming more brazen, situations escalating more quickly, frontline staff placed under increasing risk. It is happening not just in the Court Service but across health, schools, enforcement roles, investigation teams, and the wider public-facing civil service."

In support, **Emma Wilson** (Branch 731), a children's disability social worker, explained that she worked with children until the age of 18.

She told conference: "So they become young adults – very strong, very tall. They lack



MTB's John McShane briefed ADC on legal action taken on behalf of members

communication [abilities] and experience frustration related to that. So, unfortunately, whenever they feel no one can understand their wishes, violence is unfortunately one of the things that come hand in hand with that."

Emma added: "We're being sent into situations where violence is not just possible, it's actually predictable, and yet our systems continue to behave as if [that] risk doesn't exist."

Ben Eaton (Branch 94) spoke about members of his own branch who work as agricultural

inspectors. "We have staff that visit farms to do health inspections that have been hunted from those farms with shotguns, hunted from farms with dogs, hunted from farms [and] had their cars smashed."

He added: "When we talk about risk assessments, you can't risk assess for some of the jobs we do. Violent customers are our bread and butter."

Kevin Kelly (General Council), in support, said: "This motion rightly calls for union-wide commitment to zero tolerance

policies and meaningful protection for workers, because reporting mechanisms are useless if workers do not trust them."

He called for accessible reporting systems and robust risk assessments to be put in place and for trauma-informed support to be made available "because [the impact of the] violence does not end when a shift finishes". *Motion carried.*

Trade union issues

Brendan O'Reilly (Branch 119), moving **Motion 36**, spoke about the importance of trade councils as a collaborative platform for trade unions.

He told conference: "It's seldom that issues we face as a union are in isolation. In some way or form, other reps in other unions will also be affected. Trade councils act as a forum for those reps to interact with each other, to share best practice, build relationships, and to build a broad, united force to fight for our members, our class, and our society."

While acknowledging that NIPSA was already affiliated with trades councils, he said the union "can do more and should do more... to strengthen trades councils and strengthen our movement". *Motion carried.*

Health and safety

Joanne Martin (Branch 733), moving **Motion 39**, said union representatives are increasingly and "almost by default" having to deal with members going through mental health crises, serious illnesses, bereavements, and workplace trauma.

She told delegates: "The reality is that union reps are often the first point of contact... and as representatives, we are bound by confidentiality and data protection obligations, and may be unable to discuss the specifics of a case with our employer or seek support through employer channels."

Joanne pointed out that his left many reps "carrying a significant emotional burden in isolation" when employer systems fail.

She added: "When members simply do not trust management, it is often NIPSA that steps in."

Calling on NIPSA to "lead by example" and put in place a "dedicated framework of support" for reps, Joanne continued: "Delegates or representatives give their time, energy, and compassion to protect others. They are often the people members turn to at their lowest moments. It is time we ensure those representatives receive the support they need in return."

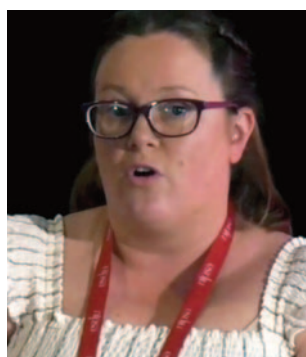
Damien McErlean (Branch 33) told delegates that reps had to deal with helping members navigate their way through



Motion 52 William Welsh



Motion 52 Ben Eaton



Motion 26 Emma Wilson



Motion 26 Joan Feeney



Motion 36 Brendan O'Reilly

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trauma and it was only natural that they themselves would experience some of the burden of that trauma.

Heather Uprichard (Branch 117) spoke to conference of her own experiences – which can be “sensitive and high-risk” – as a mental health first aider.

She said: “I did the training and I have the tools how to get a person [who has suicidal thoughts] help and support. When

I end that conversation, that person’s in a better place, and I know that they’re going to get support, or they know where to get the support.”

Debbie Barlow (Branch 732) said: “We want to protect our reps in the branches and retain our reps within branches, so that we can support our members. Our reps need to be protected mentally, emotionally, and psychologically”.

Emma Fitzsimons (Branch

732) called for a clear strategy for mental health and wellbeing to be put in place with access to training, guidance, and regular support. She added: “This is essential to protect our reps and strengthen our union.”

William Jordan (Branch 26) said employers of course had a duty of care to members of staff but insisted the “unique pressures” of being a union rep required specific support from NIPSA.

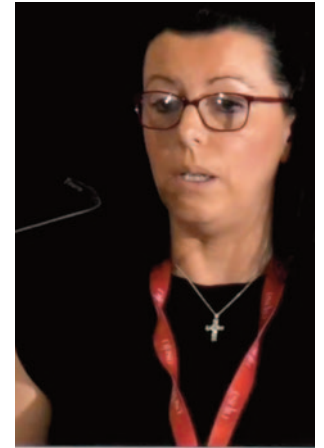
He told delegates: “Too many reps are relied upon to handle high-risk situations without proper training, without structural support, and without regular check-ins, often while dealing with their own personal challenges at the same time. It’s not sustainable.”

Paul Soto Kelly (General Council) called for remission claiming that its wording did not “reflect the full reality of what support is already available in

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Motion 39 Heather Uprichard



Motion 39 Debbie Barlow

‘Good governance’ of the union

Deputy General Secretary Antoinette McMillen moved Motions 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 – a series of constitutional amendments. She told delegates these motions “are not there just for the sake of it – they’re absolutely essential for the good governance of NIPSA”. The motions dealt with data protection, GDPR compliance, the use of inclusive gender-neutral language in the union rulebook, the issuing of nomination papers to branches for ADC, and future-proofing the way the union communicates with its members. All the motions were carried.



GS Carmel Gates, incoming VP Breandan Mulholland, incoming President Paul Dale, President Tanya Killen, Honorary Treasurer Jane Scott, and DGS Maria Morgan
NIPSA REPORTS

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workplaces for our reps". He listed the various supports and materials currently available for reps. *Remission lost; motion carried.*

International issues

First-time speaker **Edith Toppon** (Branch 15), moving **Motion 42**, updated conference on the quashing of treason and terror charges against 11 activists involved in the Nigerian #EndBadGovernance protests which were bloodily suppressed in 2024. She commended the General Council for backing the campaign to defend the accused workers and trade unionists.

She told delegates: "Although this motion concerns Nigeria, we think it is really about defending the poor and oppressed, democracy, and the right to protest across the world. In today's difficult circumstances, there will be many more protest movements likely to spring up. We will stand on the right side of history on this."

Paul Dale (General Council), in support, said: "This motion is about the Nigerian 11, but it pledges NIPSA to support the right of all workers to protest, to do so without the fear of courtrooms or the bullets of regimes."

"We know the pressure of the cost of living on fuel and food across the world, from the events of the Middle East, of Iran, of Lebanon will see protests erupt across the world in the coming year. And we, as a union, will proudly stand with them and against the trillionaires, the billionaires, corporations, and the profit gouging that goes on." *Motion carried.*

Brian England (Branch 130), moving **Motion 45**, noted that the mainstream media throughout the West was ignoring the humanitarian crisis in Cuba. He called for a complete lifting of the

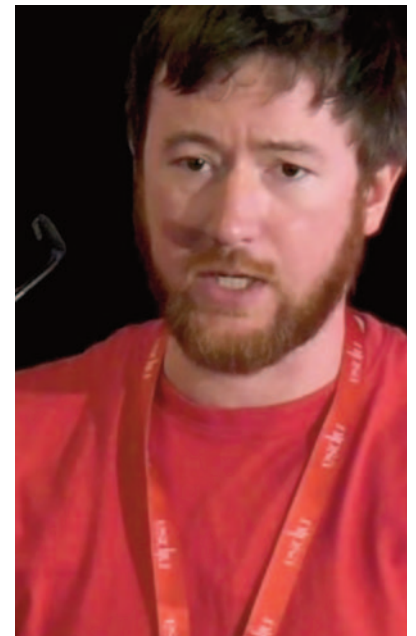
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Motion 43 Edith Toppon



Motion 45 Brian England



Motion 46 Eoin Dawson



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US blockade and an end to its “bullying politics” and “colonial overreach”.

Brian added: “It’s worth noting that all this tragic human misery is happening just over 300 miles from Disneyland.”

Lisa Mackel (General Council), in support, said: “We in the trade union movement must redouble our efforts to bring an end to the blockade, stand in solidarity with the people of Cuba, and spread the revolution.” *Motion carried.*

Organisation & Administration 2

Jake McKenny (Branch 119), moving **Motion 53**, said it was a matter of concern that last year’s anti-racism motions at ADC had not been carried unanimously.

He said: “I would like to remind everyone that racism has no place in our modern world, or in progressive trade unions, such as NIPSA. I think it’s important to reiterate our stance on anti-racism.”

Damian Maguire (Branch 730), in support, told delegates: “People say this is about democracy, that the branches make their own decisions. Democracy is not a moral alibi to vote against an anti-racist motion – simple as that. It flies in the face of all the principles of what being a trade union representative is about.”

He urged those who voted against the motions to “come out of the darkness and up to the rostrum” to explain why their branch opposes an anti-racist

motion.

Damian added: “We are an anti-racist trade union [and that doesn’t come] with an asterisk.”

Mitch Kennedy (Branch 31), opposing the motion, said: “We are absolutely an anti-racist movement. We should not tolerate racism in any shape or form – no one is denying that, but if you look in your primary agenda – 42 motions over 36 pages – these are not one-line motions. There’s nuance and complexity in every

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Motion 23 Ruaidhri O Sandair



Motion 45 Lisa Mackel



Motion 53 Jake McKenny



Motion 53 Damian Maguire

Make use of our collective power as capitalism spins out of control

Guest speaker Susan Fitzgerald, Unite’s Irish regional secretary, told conference, “We have a world to win”, and urged delegates to make use of “our collective power” to build up the trade union movement and confront the many challenges facing society.

Describing solidarity as the “cornerstone of our movement”, she admitted it is a principle that is “not always easy to deliver” pitched as it is against the backdrop of a capitalism that “pits worker against worker on a global basis”.

“I’m trying to make the word ‘solidarity’ mean something more”, she said, but admitted, “It’s not always that easy to deliver solidarity – the principle of solidarity feels harder than ever, actually.”

Flagging up the “poisonous” growth of the far right, Susan continued: “This [capitalist] system gouges [out] fault lines, it gouges [out] fault lines along gender, religion, colour, and a whole host of other issues it seeks to whip up and exploit.”

Against that she urged delegates to recognise “the power that we have” as a class. Susan said: “Our collective experience tells us that we are the progressive force in society. We are the force to deal with reaction. We’re the only class that represents

progress and forward momentum, and if we accept that, we have to look at our organisations... What role can trade unions play? What do we need to do to be up to the challenges facing working-class people?”

Society is at a turning point, she told delegates, and the “so-called liberal consensus” in the centre “is now gone” and capitalism is “out of control”.

Plague

Calling partnership a “plague on the trade union movement”, Susan said too many unions were simply engaged in “managing the sale of labour” and “getting the best price for your labour”, but insisted they have to do more than that.

Pointing out that NIPSA and Unite had a strong history of opposing partnership, she said: “We have to identify that workers and bosses’ interests are not aligned”. She asked: “Why would we not use that collective power? We have to bring people with us. We’re not there at this stage in my view... while it’s hard and it can be a grind. It tells you that we actually can build, and when we’re brave enough to fight, we can win. We have a world to win, and we need to deliver that for the generations coming behind us.”

GUEST SPEAKER



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motion, and people might oppose them or abstain for various reasons.”

He added: “If you’re wording your motions badly, or if you’re putting in your own slant into the wording...before getting to the bit at the end that everyone agrees on. Some branches are going to oppose that, and it is their right to do that.”

Siobhan Bell (General Council), in support, said: “At a time when divisions and intolerance can too easily grow, it is important that we all continue to clearly and consistently reiterate NIPSA’s anti-racism stance. That is why this union will continue to speak clearly and unapologetically against racism in all its forms.” *Motion carried.*

Public Policy 3

Deputy General Secretary **Maria Morgan** (General Council), moving **Motion 58**, described the Good Jobs Bill as a “good first step” towards strengthening workers’ rights and “rebuilding the foundation of collective bargaining in the workplace”.

She said the legislation signalled



Motion 53 Siobhan Bell

a recognition that decent work must be at the heart of a decent society and pointed out that this was the first opportunity in decades to begin to roll back anti-trade union laws introduced by the Thatcher government.

Underlining that this was “only a starting point” along that path, Maria did flag up the importance of the proposed introduction of electronic balloting.

“It is essential that trade union ballots are conducted efficiently, securely, and in a way that reflects how workers communicate today.”

Maria also said unions should



Motion 65 Joanne Martin

make use of this opportunity to call for a bolstering of the rights of workers taking industrial action.

“If we are serious about fairness, then the law must enhance those protections,” she added. *Motion carried.*

Public Policy 4

Joanne Martin (Branch 733), moving **Motion 65**, outlined the severe impact chronic understaffing and unsafe workloads was having in pushing Northern Ireland’s public services to a breaking point. She told



Motion 65 George Brownlee

conference:

- There were more than 5,700 vacant posts across the health and social care sector, with over 540,000 people on waiting lists;

- NICS workforce had fallen by 20% since 2021 despite increasing demands on services;

- Schools were continuing to experience significant recruitment and retention challenges; and

- £1 billion had been spent on agency costs in Northern Ireland’s nursing sector.

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New vision for NIPSA comms

Explaining her role as NIPSA’s newly-appointed communications and research officer, Emma McConville told conference she wanted to ensure the “genuinely impactful” work carried out by NIPSA on the ground is “seen, heard, and understood” as widely as possible.

She said this involved “strengthening and modernising” the union’s communications platforms “to reflect the strength of the organisation” and to sharpen up “how we present ourselves visually” while at the same time setting forth “consistent and clear messaging”.

Addressing delegates directly, Emma insisted that it was also “about amplifying your voices”.

“There are incredible stories across every sector and branch – stories of wins, campaigns, support, resilience, and we need to be better at telling those stories and celebrating our work.”

Pointing out that good communications is not just about “broadcasting information”, she said it also involved making it easier for members “to engage, access support, and feel



NIPSA’s new Communications and Research Officer Emma McConville speaks to conference about exciting new developments in the way the union interacts online with its members

connected to the union” and welcomed the work being taken to update the membership database and website, transforming it into a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) platform.

This work is being spearheaded by Agenda, an English-based strategic communications agency, that works with trade unions.

Agenda’s co-director **Victoria Barlow** also spoke to conference about the initiative, which was launched in March.

Victoria, a former assistant general secretary with the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, told delegates unions were moving towards new CRM platforms “that can deliver so much more for memberships than just subs collection”.

She explained: “We know they’re also the spaces where current members can find the support and advice they need, and importantly, where you can have routes to organise them and get them engaged and active in their union to build that strength and influence.”

Victoria also flagged up special portals for reps to access useful data allowing them “to see your joiners and your leavers”.

Other portals would allow members to update their details, sign up for events or take part in surveys or petitions.

Victoria stressed that Agenda were having “a good old dig around” with the current set-up with a view to “interviewing, workshopping and surveying” staff, reps, and members in the months ahead to find the best way to make effective use of the data.

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Joanne told delegates: “Staff are being pushed to breaking point, experiencing burnout, stress, morale, injury, and unmanageable pressure as they struggle to deliver safe, effective, and dignified services in environments stretched beyond capacity across health, education, the civil service, local government, housing, justice, and other public services.”

She pointed out that workforce pressures not only impacted on staff wellbeing but also affected the “quality, accessibility, and timeliness” of vital public services.

First-time speaker **George Brownlee** (Branch 524) spoke of his own firsthand experience of understaffing and unsafe workloads at Queen’s University in Belfast.

He said: “Members are now expected to do more, take on additional responsibilities, and maintain the same level of service, often with no extra pay, no extra support, and no recognition of the strain they’re under.”

George added that staff are exhausted and their morale is low: “Many feel they are being pushed to the breaking point simply for trying to provide the quality of service that students and the public deserve.”

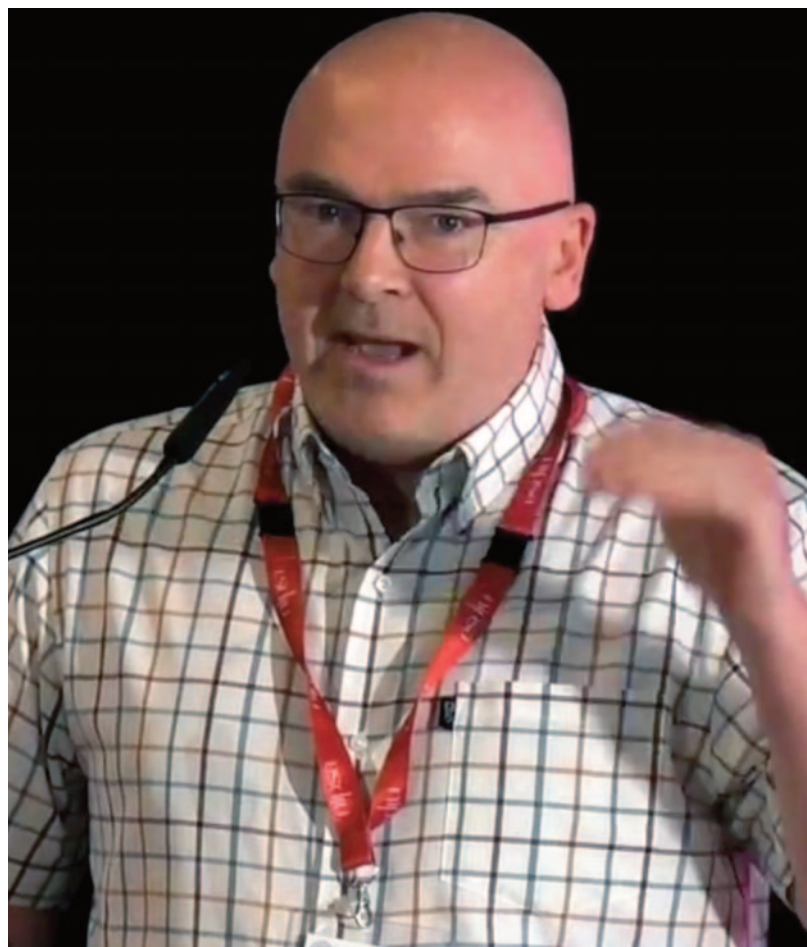
Motion carried.

Damian Maguire (Branch 730), moved **Motion 68** on poverty pay, telling conference people should be able to earn enough money “to have a decent life... with dignity and respect”.

Damian pointed out that many health service workers on Bands 2, 3 and 4 had to rely on benefits: “Most of these staff are female and a lot of them are single parents – so many are struggling in terms of the enormous rise in the cost of living.”

He welcomed that NIPSA had played a “real key role” in highlighting the issue and driving it forward, and added: “No public sector workers should be working full time and still live in huge debt and hardship

Padraig Mulholland (General Council), in support, called on conference to “prepare itself” to support health workers “who will



Motion 68 Padraig Mulholland

almost inevitably have to take strike action to force the living wage on to the agenda... in the very near future”.

And he described the cost of

introducing a real living wage within health as “minuscule” when compared to the overall health budget.

Padraig explained: “It is a

political decision not to have the real living wage in health, just as it is a political decision to have poverty pay.

“From the perspectives of capitalism and labour, the struggle that we are engaged in is over the fruits of the economy. On their side, they are driven by profit. On our side, we want to maximise wages and the social wage.” *Motion carried.*



Current VP Paul Dale, who is incoming NIPSA President, makes a few closing remarks to conference before Eoin Dawson (below) leads delegates in the traditional singing of *The Red Flag*

