

Report – Midlands TUC

Alan Barker and Jon Dale attended the Midlands TUC meeting on 13th April at the Derby Conference Centre.

Around 60 people were in attendance.

Please see the attached motions, all of which were passed with no opposition.

TUC General Secretary

Kevin Nowak spoke at the beginning of the meeting. He highlighted a number of successes that unions have enjoyed over the last year. He referenced the ongoing situation in Gaza and reiterated his belief that unions have a right to talk about and take a position on this issue. He called for a ceasefire and a permanent 2 state solution.

Priorities for the coming year are political change, a new deal for workers and renewal of the Trade Union movement. One issue is that, despite successes and increased levels of action, trade union membership has fallen by around 200 thousand, probably due to it being seen as a relatively easy way for individuals to save money during the cost of living crisis.

Amazon's fight for union recognition was covered in his address and was a theme running through the whole conference with speakers from Amazon and a great deal of support evident in the room.

He warned about the endless culture wars initiated and used by the Tory government to distract from their own shortcomings. The enormous disparities in wealth were talked about; top executives earn more by 4th January than their average workers do all year, in Notting Hill 6400 people 'earn' more in capital gains than the total wealth of three large cities and other examples.

The minimum service levels are recognised as a serious threat to our movement, potentially taking away the right to strike for 1 in 5 workers while being simultaneously unworkable.

He also questioned the wisdom of forcing people back to offices. Indeed, this point was made in some speeches on the motions. Companies saved money during lockdown by making offices smaller. It is now not possible to fit all workers back into offices, but at the same time, they still want to.

Nowak was clearly very supportive of Labour and the position of the TUC is very much that we should support the election of a Labour government while being a 'critical friend' and making sure we hold an incoming administration to account. It's safe to say that there was considerably more scepticism from the floor.

A theme running through the conference was that there is a clear need to involve unorganised workers, especially in the private sector. Also, our reps are generally older than the people they represent and rather unrepresentative in other ways. Discussions are ongoing about how to remedy this.

Disputes

There then followed various reports about ongoing disputes. The proposed closure of Alstom Manufacturing (a railway rolling stock manufacturing company) and the effect this will have on the surrounding area was debated. Amazon are spending millions of pounds on union busting

activities but they are unionising nevertheless and there have been significant successes in organising this sector.

Reps from Unison talked about council budget cuts and the many hidden services council provide which are very much under threat. Passing on central government cuts to local authorities has been a very clever way of blaming local councils, particularly Labour ones, for the actions of the Tories in Westminster.

Finally, USDAW highlighted their campaign 'Freedom from Fear' which is an attempt to protect shopworkers from attack – a problem which is very much on the increase.

Claire Ward

The (then) Labour candidate for East Midlands Mayor spoke about her campaign and vision for the East Midlands. She wants to use the new devolution powers to help the local area. This includes opportunities to invest in clean energy, the creation of a 'good employment charter', college courses offered to meet the needs of local businesses and the promotion of 'active travel' to get people out of cars.

She was particularly keen to discuss the public transport arrangements in the region, using the new powers to take failing bus companies back under local control, along similar lines to the situation we have in Nottingham City.

I have attached Labour's New Deal for Working People, which sets out Labour's policies on labour relations.

Motions

The afternoon was spent discussing motions (attached), all of which were passed. Jon spoke to Motion 5, discussing a Just Transition and I spoke about the experiences in Nottingham as they pertained to Motion 9.

Alan Barker