

# UNISON - we do not poach members !!!!

# SWU Social Workers Union

A personal response to the accusations made by members of another union and reported in the SWU bulletin September 2021 after the TUC refused SWU due to UNISON blocking our application.

*"The allegation of poaching members is alarming as I just need to look at the complaints we regularly receive at SWU about UNISON reps providing false information to Social Workers about SWU." Responding to SWU's complaint - John McGowan, Sept 2021, reporting that SWU's application to join the TUC had been turned down (again).*

The term 'Conspiracy Theory' is a phrase much banded about these days, but what does it actually mean and what or whose purpose does it serve, the so called conspirers or those pointing the finger? Well that is what I am about to consider, specifically the theory that my union, the Social Workers Union, are poaching members from one (if not more) of the other more generic unions. Membership of a union is an individual and protected right.<sup>1</sup> To therefore imply that SWU is stealing members is indeed a serious allegation which surely requires some official investigation to see if we are indeed poaching!

Unlike some unions to be a member of the Social Workers Union one has to be a registered social worker of which, according to the regulatory body Social Work England, there are over 100,000. The title Social Worker is itself also protected by that very same regulatory body. This year 2021 SWU is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. SWU has always publicised its membership numbers and is proud to announce, as it has done from day one, that current membership has now topped 15,000. By its rules therefore SWU's maximum total membership cannot exceed 100,000! In contrast there are three big unions who together represents over 3 million members working across the local authority, NHS and caring professions, some of whom are social workers. What is still unclear is how many of those remaining 85,000 registered social workers are or are not members of those unions!?

If as they (the other unions) claim they represent the majority of registered social workers, why do they feel threatened by SWU, and go on to make spurious claims that we are poaching members?



I have to say I am appalled that another union would allow itself to use the term 'poaching' which means stealing, thieving or pilfering against another union!

How I ask myself, would a union undertake this act. Would they perhaps break into the larger Unions Office and hack into the membership list to cancel members membership and at the same time sign them up - standing order and all to SWU? Would they grab hold of a member in the workplace and twist their arm to sign a new membership card to join SWU? As I write it sounds more and more like a James Bond Film!

What would be the purpose of poaching all these people? Perhaps SWU is perceived as a threat - which is one definition of 'Conspiracy Theory' - having a political base which of course implies some form of threat to the current status quo/or power base.

To refer to SWU as poaching members from another union is actually an insult and most disrespectful to their own members as it implying that they (the member and qualified social worker to boot) do not have 'free will' and could be taken with ease from the other union.

Of the many professions who have a specialist union, social workers more than others understand the rights of association and affiliation as well as social justice and community engagement - their choice would be an action of free will and not of being lured in any way or form!

However if 'luring' is me having a conversation with social workers who are not members of SWU and saying 'why wouldn't you want to belong to a union run by social workers for social workers' then perhaps I am that poacher!

As a social worker whose role is to empower and support the most vulnerable members of society and a long-time member of the SWU Executive Committee I am appalled to hear these accusations continue to be banded about without proof.

**Angi Naylor, SWU Executive Member**

#### NOTE

The big three representing Local Authority, NHS and Care Sector:

GMB : 620,000

Unison : 1.4m

Unite : 1.4m claims it is the largest (2020)