

Meeting ongoing challenges online

The Social Workers Union 2020 AGM reinforced the positives with being a social worker and some great successful motions were presented albeit in a different format this year. However, to say that social work is a challenging profession is of course something of an understatement and this is an important message heard throughout the 2020 AGM and AGM Reports. We all know the impact on social workers of cutbacks to services and staffing but we also know the terrific work we

do and continue to do regardless of a pandemic. We can never lose sight of the positive work we all do as social workers and that sense of promoting real change for the people we work with which is part of the social work DNA. There are however still on-going challenges in the workplace and promoting the great work we do widely throughout the media and the public. We will continue our battle to promote social work

Our online AGM panalists



further and challenge poor social work practices in the workplaces and look forward to working with members over the next 12 months to furnish some of our AGM commitments and ongoing campaigning.

As a SWU member, you will know that Employment Representation from a Qualified Social Worker, who knows the profession inside and out, is important. The Trade Union Advice and Representation (A&R) Team are at the forefront of this organisations and if you ever need their services then you can be assured of professionalism from a service from social workers who understand the profession. Hopefully the additional SWU benefits will also add value to the extra you pay to SWU over your BASW membership; at only £25 a year (£10 for students) this continues to be terrific value with no increase this year.

The General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) training options available to members are worthy of a look as are the legal and financial discounts and training provided from Dr Neil Thompson. I would urge all SWU members to spread the word and encourage social work colleagues and friends to join. It is much more than just paying your fee as a safety net in case you need representation; as we have lots more going on, and opportunities to be active.

I am delighted to report that the following motions were all passed unanimously:

Motion 1

Government policy advocates involving people with lived experience in the design and delivery of health and social care. The Austerity Action Group supports such involvement in policy formation but has noted that many service user and carer organisations have folded under austerity and that it is increasingly difficult to attract people with lived experience to commit to co-production. Key reasons for this are the fear of benefits sanctions and the complexities involved in deducting tax and NI for what is often casual, time-limited involvement. Local benefits advice on how to remunerate



AGM Motions presenters

such involvement is convoluted and contradictory while universities and agencies all take different approaches. The Austerity Action Group proposes in this Motion that it will use its influence as part of SWU, and network across the UK to consult with key stakeholders towards defining a clear policy to put to government regarding remuneration for involvement of service users and carers.

Motion 2

Social work consists of between 78 and 80 percent female workforce and for this reason is described as a "female-dominated profession". McPhail has argued that "social work is more correctly described as a female majority, male-dominated profession" (McPhail, 2004b: 325). SWU will work to support women are heard and represented through all of its work and endeavours.

Ref: McPhail BA. (2004b) Setting the record straight: Social work is not a female-dominated profession. Social Work 49(2): 323–326. [PubMed] [Google Scholar]

Motion 3

The SWU Exec would like to ask the AGM to endorse our thanks to the many social workers who have continued to provide an essential service in very difficult circumstances during the current Covid19 pandemic.

Motion 4

This AGM recognises the great work being undertaken by our union contact activists in helping to support our members through these difficult times and in particular to note the value of the highly skilled advice & representative service providing professional services to those of our members who are experiencing problems in their workplace.

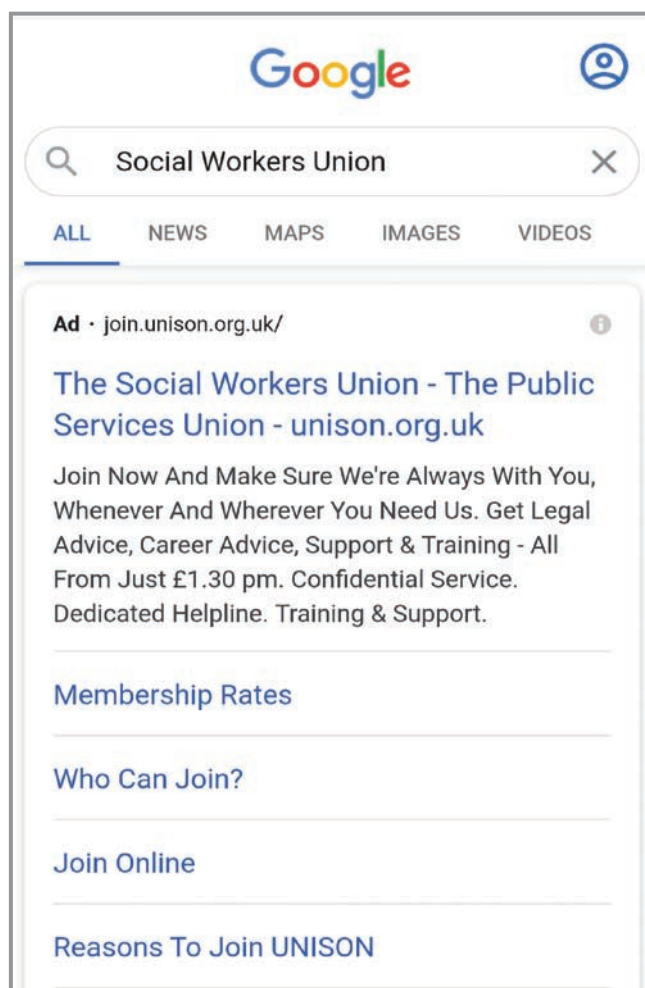
Unfortunately, several large individual unions have continued to lose membership over the past decade. I am therefore particularly pleased to say that membership of the Social Workers Union has expanded, and we are getting close to 14,000 members. Unions have a representative role in the workplace and challenging poor working conditions. Therefore, a more collaborative approach with the British Association of Social Workers - our professional association - will continue to work best for social workers in the long term and this was a clear message presented at the 2020 AGM.

Although we continue to develop and grow as a union; you can see clearly that the union is active and terrific value for members. With our status as an organisational member of BASW we can provide annual membership for BASW members for only £25 (£10 for students).

Finally, just to make members aware that another union for social workers - UNISON; have continued with their expensive Google advert which is really misleading and ethically not right. Legal advice to SWU was that this would be an expensive process to challenge; however, despite raising this with UNISON and more widely in social media, the Google advert (below) continues. In a positive way, it is a credit to SWU that a large union like UNISON needs to mislead social workers by directing Social Workers Union searches on Google to their union! We must be doing something right.



John McGowan
General Secretary
j.mcgowan@swu-union.org.uk



Executive changes at SWU

We once more have a full Executive Committee of ten SWU members which is great to see and hopefully SWU can utilise the mixed skills and the range of experiences each member brings to the Executive. There are lots of ways to be active in the union through the Executive, Union Contacts, Austerity Action Group etc so please do keep in touch.

President / Chair:

One of the decisions at the 2020 AGM was to change the terminology from SWU President to SWU Chair. The new Chair of SWU will be elected from the SWU Executive early October 2020 and this will be covered in the November edition of the newsletter. James Birchall will continue as an elected SWU Executive Member.

Continuing SWU Executive members:

James Birchall

Gerry Madden

Angi Naylor

Rebecca Austin

Malcolm Jordan

Carys Phillips

New Executive Members:



Ann Marie Hayes

'I think it is important to recognise the enormous range of knowledge, skills and experiences of social workers whilst acknowledging that sometimes difficulties arise that benefit from the protection and advice that a Trade Union such as SWU offers to its members. I want SWU to continue to represent social workers by offering an 'insider' perspective that facilitates a challenge to 'outsider' judgements. The unique professional nature of SWU means it can offer legal and professional clout when practitioners are in need of support, even if that two-year old child has no toys left in the pram'.



Jessica Nielson

'I would like to further my skills and confidence to increase SWU membership within my area and Scotland overall. I would like the opportunity to take voices from the frontline forward and work with my colleagues within other unions. I have been an active union contact and shared information with my previous team as well as supporting students to apply. I want to see a diverse range of social work practitioners within the executive team to raise our voices and those of our service users from the varied and complex issues effecting front line practice. An example of this thirst for knowledge came from the PALUK trip in October in which I got to learn about our profession and walk with colleagues within occupied Palestine'.



Tina Peterson

'I've supported SWU and the Union Contact Manager many times at rallies and promotional events; helping to generate interest/new members/merchandising on SWU stalls, helping at training/AGM, attending rallies with other SWU members, to promote Social Work, provide a presence and show solidarity for Unionism in all forms. Looking to the future I'd like to be more actively involved at the policy/decision making level, collaborating and debating with like-minded people on important issues that affect Social Workers in their work, both on an individual and a collective level. I am prepared to work hard to help increase SWU membership and positively promote our profession to a wider audience.'

David Callow

'In my childhood, I witnessed the importance of trade unions, having had many long discussions with my father, an active member of the Transport and General Workers Union. I believe the positive impact of these informative years, present in my own union experience through Unite and more recently with SWU, would allow me to bring a deep level of understanding of the trade union movement to the Executive role that is firmly built on values of equality, social justice and democracy.'

Below: SWU Executive Members with eye-catching promotional merchandise



Poetry for Social Workers: Reflections on *The Father* by Roger Robinson

A review by Dr Ariane Critchley of Edinburgh Napier University

In the June SWU Newsletter, my colleague Dr Autumn Roesch-Marsh (The University of Edinburgh) introduced our plans for a poetry anthology for newly qualified social workers. As she described in her piece, the aim of the anthology is to provide a companion of poems for social workers that explores the meaning of social work and compassion in order to promote self-care and wellbeing. We are delighted that the Social Workers Union recognise the value of this project and have agreed to support it with sponsorship. You can read more about the project, and how you can contribute, on the Scottish Poetry Library website.

In this month's newsletter, I preview a poem we have selected for inclusion in the anthology, accompanied by commentary. In this way, I aim to demonstrate the relevance and power of poetry for social work. This month, we have permission to share *The Father* from Roger Robinson's collection *A Portable Paradise*, published by Peepal Tree Press.



The Father

This twelve-year-old girl, doing an interview on the TV about her father being missing after the fire, is becoming her father. She is already head and shoulders above her mother who stands behind her, red-rimmed eyes darting with worry. Note when the interviewer asks how she feels, the daughter starts becoming her father. She concentrates her answer on the actions she must take, the things that are directly within her control. Days later she will fill in the forms necessary for them to get new housing. She will wake up her mother, weak with grief, and bring to her bed fattet hummus and makdous with olive oil and za'tar. She will make her mother have a shower in the morning and comb her mother's hair and lay her clothes on the bed. She has taken to reading several newspapers while drinking strong cardamom-flavoured coffee while Umm Kulthum is singing about her heart on the radio.

Through the poem, we enter into the life of a young girl, newly bereaved by the disaster of the Grenfell Tower fire, in which 72 people died. At the moment captured in the poem, this loss is still ambiguous, her mother's eyes are 'red-rimmed' and 'darting with worry', the permanence of the father's departure is possibly not established. Looking in and back from three years on, we fear the worst. As readers, we witness the girl 'becoming her father' as she cares tenderly for her mother, and takes on adult roles and bureaucratic systems. This becoming of our parents can be understood as natural; a part of life. Yet here, the rhythm of life jars, the needle skips on the vinyl, and what might have taken decades, occurs overnight. The girl is 'head and shoulders above her mother', we see her as suddenly grown into herself. Even her tastes seem beyond her years: strong coffee and Umm Kulthum.

Our immediate impulse in reading about the girl may be parental and nurturing. However, I find myself questioning if that is how I would interpret her life and situation as a social worker. An adultification bias has been shown to exist in relation to black girls. This is to say, that they are seen as less innocent than their white peers, and held to higher standards. If we met the girl at the heart of the poem, as she tried to secure housing, how might we react? Would we falsely assume she was able to manage capably and 'adultify' her? Or might we in the other direction, assess her as unhealthily 'parentified' within the family, as a 'young carer' at risk? In the poem, we meet this family in a moment of very public, televised, grief. As the proximity of the disaster fades from public consciousness, will this girl, and her mother be met with compassion or judgement? How might we as social workers honour the extreme trauma that can shape families, relationships, and people in unexpected ways?

The poem may also strike us as a call to political action. We observe this family's suffering with the knowledge that three years on from the Grenfell disaster, people continue to live in unsafe housing, vulnerable to fire. This, despite the ongoing campaigns of Justice4Grenfell and Grenfell United for justice, for honest memorialisation of the tragedy, and for change. From our position as readers, we know that the girl may face an uphill battle in securing safe, and permanent housing for herself and her mother. We fear the discrimination she may encounter as she approaches public services for support and help. The poem reminds us of the importance of anti-oppressive practice, and our profession's role in calling for social justice. Are we contributing sufficiently to an anti-racist revolution, as described powerfully by Wayne Reid? And has social work done enough to amplify the voices of the Grenfell Tower survivors?

The poem speaks to a newly absent father, to his significance in the life of the girl and her mother. After years of research evidence establishing this as a problem, we do not always engage well with men as fathers in social work. The father who gives the poem its title is suddenly, tragically, lost. His absence feels loud and expansive. However, in social work we have been guilty of taking paternal absence for granted, or of failing to see fathers who are actually involved in families (Brown et al., 2009). What can we learn from this poem about the importance of fathers in shaping the lives and identities of their daughters, and sons?

Robinson is one of my favourite poets, as I experience his writing as a sucker-punch to the heart. Through that engagement of the heart, we are transported into the lives of others. In engaging our empathy, and our own experiences of grief and confusion, the poem allows for exploration of some key social work themes.

Dr Ariane Critchley
Edinburgh Napier
University
Twitter: @arianecritchley

References and Acknowledgements

Brown, L., Callahan, M., Strega, S., Walmsley, C., and Dominelli, L. (2009). Manufacturing ghost fathers: The paradox of father presence and absence in child welfare. *Child and Family Social Work*, 14(1), 25-34.

Robinson, R. (2019). *A Portable Paradise*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press. Permission to reproduce *The Father* from this collection was given to the Scottish Poetry Library.

Photograph credit: dee, freely sourced at Morguefile.

SWU/BASW Austerity Action Group Update

BASW, National Survivor User Network (NSUN), Policy Ethics & Human Rights Committee (PEHR), Social Workers Union (SWU), Social Workers Without Borders (SWWB)

Discussions around the limitations of virtual meetings, online campaigning, and maintaining interactions highlighting the positives of user-led community groups emerging from the pandemic, interacting virtually and through social media. It's important also to acknowledge the impact of austerity and inequalities compounded by the pandemic upon many service users who have no access to internet, Wi-Fi, laptops, or mobile phones. The pandemic has also led to the exclusion of people who don't cope well with online resources, have no experience or training in technology or find that too much online activity triggers anxieties and mental health issues. The AAG encourages professionals to highlight inequalities through rights-based practice.

Difficult and isolating times for people with lived experiences are often alleviated to a degree by providing their much-valued input and personal contributions to groups such as the AAG. This however is made more difficult by the complexities of groups making payments to people with lived experience who contribute their time and knowledge to organisations. The AAG value the input of our members from the survivor and service-user background, and it saddens and frustrates us to be facing difficulties in providing remuneration, as making such payments can hinder receipt of benefits which are often means tested, as well as causing tax-related issues for those in employment. The AAG would welcome input

and advice in relation to making payments to service users in ways that do not jeopardise their benefits or salaries.

The AAG acknowledges and supports the good work of Marcus Rashford whose high profile has successfully highlighted issues of food poverty and inequality. We note with interest that the "National Food Strategy Organisation" linked to Marcus Rashford does not appear to include any service-users or social work representatives on its lengthy list of steering group members. The AAG plan to write to the organisation to request who is providing the view of those with lived experiences and social work.

Back in April the AAG wrote an open letter to Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, highlighting the desperate need for proper funding of social care; a review of the tax and benefit system to ensure that it works fairly for all; and reversal of the systematic destruction of local authority services. AAG feel that the next step is to correspond again with additional input from survivor service users.

Shelter have provided a Template Letter to send to rental agents and landlords who state "no DSS". A law change in July 2020 makes No DSS policies unlawful under the Equality Act 2010.

If you'd like to be involved in the Austerity Action Group or have any comments or questions, please contact carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk

Social Media

If you have not done so then please follow us on Facebook and Twitter - we are planning to post and tweet regular updates about the work and developments of the Social Workers Union.

SWU Updates: <http://swu-updates.org.uk/>

Monthly ebulletins

Monthly ebulletins are emailed to all SWU members. If you are not receiving this then please check what email address we have.

The ebulletins are also published on the web site.

SWU can be found on the following:

Twitter: SWU_UK

Facebook: www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk/

Internet: www.swu-union.org.uk

How to Survive in Social Work

by
Neil Thompson and John McGowan

*with a Foreword by Ruth Allen, an Afterword by David Jones
and Illustrations by Harry Venning*

When the general secretary of a trade union and an author with a background in workplace well-being come together and they are both highly critical of austerity and the neoliberal ideology that gave rise to it, then it is perhaps inevitable that the book they decide to co-write will be on surviving in the modern workplace. When you add to this the fact that they are both highly experienced social work professionals with a strong commitment to its value, it is no surprise that the title of the book should be *How to Survive in Social Work*.

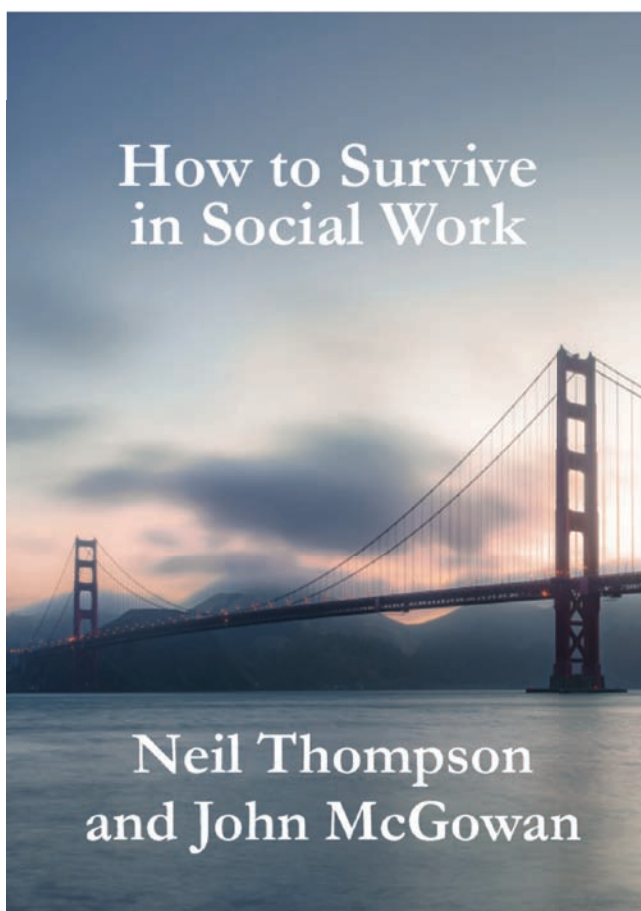
Social work by its very nature is challenging and demanding work. But, in the current social, economic and political climate, it can prove extraordinarily difficult to keep your head above water. Written by two highly experienced social work professionals, this important book explores the significance of that context, offers guidance on how to survive despite it and even to aim for thriving within it. There are no easy answers, but there is much we can do to make sure that we are able to fulfil the potential and value of social work as a force for making our society a humane one without sacrificing our own health and well-being.

Dr Neil Thompson is an independent writer, educator and adviser.
His website and Learning Zone are at:
www.NeilThompson.info.

John McGowan is the General Secretary of the Social Workers Union and also works with the Open University in Scotland.

Their book, *How to Survive in Social Work*, is published by Avenue Media Solutions. It is available at £15.99 directly from the publisher:
<https://bit.ly/3hyyyWk>
or via Amazon Books.

<https://www.avenuemediasolutions.com/product/how-to-survive-in-social-work/>



How to Survive in Social Work

Book Reviews

“Social work is one of the most misunderstood and difficult professions there is. It can be physically and emotionally draining, but it is also one of the most rewarding professions there is. Social work has been put under immense pressure, hit hard by years of austerity and forgotten when it comes to key/frontline workers in the coronavirus pandemic. In a world of increasing complexity and demands, where human connections and interactions are decreasing, social workers will be needed and valued more than ever before. Armed with this book you won’t just survive social work but thrive in it too.”

Emma Lewell-Buck MP (former social worker), Member of Parliament for South Shields

“Ten chapters packed full of key strategies, guidance, insight and support that all social work students will find essential reading as they progress through their studies and into practice. SCRATCH and BEYOND are surely the new frameworks for students to pop into their growing toolkits! The language is easy to read and relatable, the content refreshing as it acknowledges the importance of reflective practice in an increasingly pressurized role - while recognizing that it is possible to not only survive, but also thrive in social work today! At the Student Social Work Hub we believe that’s what everyone should be aiming for.”

The Student Social Work Hub, <https://thestudentsocialworkhub.wordpress.com>

“This is a must-read for social workers and their employers. Social work is widely understood to be one of the most stressful jobs in the UK and beyond, meaning there is a clear need for books that outline the problem as well as methods for individuals, management and organisations to address the problem. This book does each of these things from an expert-informed and research-based perspective. I would recommend that social work professionals and employers read this book and use the stress management skills suggested for the betterment of individual well-being, which will subsequently improve outcomes for service users.”

Dr Jermaine M. Ravalier, Bath Spa University

“This welcome book is about more than survival, important though that is. It invites us to go beyond ‘good enough’ into a Nietzschean affirmation, a ‘saying yes’ to life and to social work, while remaining rooted in a realism that transcends both a deadening negativity on the one hand and a rose-tinted optimism on the other. And, as the authors so rightly remind us throughout, it is crucial that we do this collectively. So, buy, share, read, discuss this book together, with your team or at your trade union or professional association branch. Survive, and thrive, in solidarity!”

Guy Shennan, The Solution-Focused Collective www.guyshennan.com

“An entirely readable and timely reminder of all we learned in our social work training, together with some contemporary critical thinking around why our work can be even more challenging in these difficult times, with practical advice on what needs to happen to help us all to thrive (not just survive!). Every social worker, at any stage in their career, should have a copy close to hand to dip into regularly and to remind us what a complex, but wonderfully interesting and rewarding job social work is!”

Lien Watts, Head of Advice and Representation, British Association of Social Workers

Unconscious Racial Bias

The recent articles from SWU Advice and Representation have gone down well with a number of emails asking for more. We are therefore delighted that SWU Trade Union Advice and Representation Officer Julie Long shares another piece of advice.

Unconscious bias is within everyone. As our brain receives information, we are drawing on our past experiences constantly. We make decisions about people regarding gender, age, ethnicity, education and sexual orientation. These are developed from our social background and also views purported by friends, colleagues and from the media. The brain has developed judgements and biases through evolution for tens of thousands of years, for basic human survival. These judgements are placed into categories within the brain, to help us make rapid decisions that could be life-saving.

In modern society and particularly in the workplace, this can lead to unconscious bias towards a person. These biases could affect recruitment, promotion, disciplinary processes and how diverse the overall workforce is. In an interview process, factors that could lead to bias are a stereotype, based on gender, ethnicity and other social categories, what the interviewee is wearing, the accent of the interviewee and the CV, where the interviewer could make assumptions about the candidate, based on subjects studied and outside activities.

Unconscious racial bias can be developed significantly by social surroundings and the media. A survey by the Guardian found that 43% of those from a minority ethnic background had been overlooked for a work promotion in a way that felt unfair in the last five years, more than twice the proportion of white people (18%) who reported the same experience. It also reported recruitment consultancy Green Park, had found that the total number of BAME board members, both executive and non-executive at FTSE 100 companies, had



decreased to just 7.4%, down nearly 9% from 2018. Forty seven of the companies still had no BAME people at board and executive level. The firm chair, former Equalities Commission head Trevor Phillips, said: “Our latest analysis shows that after five years of monitoring, the promise that things would change over time for ethnic minority leaders in the FTSE 100, looks just as empty as the corporate pipeline. Women are cracking the glass ceiling; but people of colour remain super-glued to the corporate floor.”

On the 1st October 2010 the Equality Act 2010 took effect, replacing the previous workplace discrimination legislation. This was brought in to help strengthen and protect people from being disadvantaged by age, disability, race, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) were set up as independent statutory body, on the back of the Equality Act and have taken more than 80 legal actions, with success in over two thirds of cases. In her 2017 review, *Race in the Workplace*, Baroness McGregor-Smith highlighted the ‘structural, historical bias’ that prevents ethnic

minorities, women, disabled people and others from progressing in their careers. She recommended that the UK Government create a free, online unconscious bias training (UBT) resource to tackle the unconscious bias that she described as 'much more pervasive and more insidious than the overt racism that we associate with the 1970s' (McGregor-Smith, 2017, p.2).

If we take a look at the recent *Hastings v Kings College* case, it was found that Kings College used unconscious racial bias towards Mr Hastings, when dealing with a disciplinary. Mr Hastings a man of African-Caribbean descent, had worked at the King's College Hospital NHS Trust since 1st December 1996, as an IT manager. In October 2015, Mr Hastings was dismissed following an incident of racial abuse in the hospital's car park. Mr Hastings had been verbally sworn at by a van driver of Caucasian descent, whilst waiting in a loading bay, for a car parking space to become available. The van contained three Caucasian males, two of whom were contractors employed by the Trust at the time of the altercation. Mr Hastings approached the van after the initial incident and was immediately subjected to a racial slur regarding his skin colour, being told "careful it doesn't come off". Mr Hastings then proceeded to tell men who he was. Upon hearing his name, one of the men uttered that he could not have such an "English-sounding name". Mr Hastings carried on and told them he was a manager at the hospital and one of the men in the van replied, "look! They'll let anything happen in here".

During the incident, Mr Hastings had called the Security Office for assistance but no help was given and the call was not logged. After the altercation, the Trust suspended Mr Hastings due to an allegation that he had "acted aggressively towards and physically assaulted two other persons". After consulting the CCTV evidence, the Trust came to the conclusion that Mr Hastings was the aggressor. During the investigation Mr Hastings provided evidence of the racial abuse and explained he had in fact been defending himself. Mr Hastings' version was not investigated at all by the Trust. Following the investigation he was dismissed on the grounds of gross misconduct.

Mr Hastings brought claims for unfair dismissal and direct race discrimination before the Employment Tribunal. The Tribunal found that Mr Hastings has been subjected to unconscious bias during the investigation, finding that his evidence, as a man of African-Caribbean descent, was treated with distrust. The Tribunal stated that the employer had failed to consider that Mr Hastings had been racially abused, and had failed to identify and collect any evidence to support Mr Hastings' claim that he had been abused. The Tribunal found in Mr Hastings' favour; he was directly discriminated against on the grounds of his race, and was treated less favourably due to the Trust's failure to investigate his complaints. The Trust were ordered to pay Mr Hastings a total of £1 million in compensation, by the Employment Tribunal. The figure being an accumulation of payments for a basic award, injury to Mr Hastings feelings, damages for personal injury, and compensation for pecuniary loss. The vast majority of the compensation was due to the significant pension loss suffered by Mr Hastings, after nearly twenty years at the Trust.

In order to try and prevent unconscious bias, employers should implement different policies and procedures, that limit characteristics of individuals and preferences. All evidence in cases should be taken into consideration and time, consideration and the awareness of the existence of unconscious bias, should be used in an effort to overcome their own bias.

If you consider that you may have been subjected to unconscious racial bias in the work-place and would like to discuss this issue further, please contact the Advice & Representation Service to make an appointment with a duty officer on **0121 622 8413**

References

McGregor-Smith, R. (2017), *Race in the workplace: The McGregor-Smith review*. London: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/594336/race-in-workplace-mcgregor-smith-review.pdf [accessed: 5 February 2018]

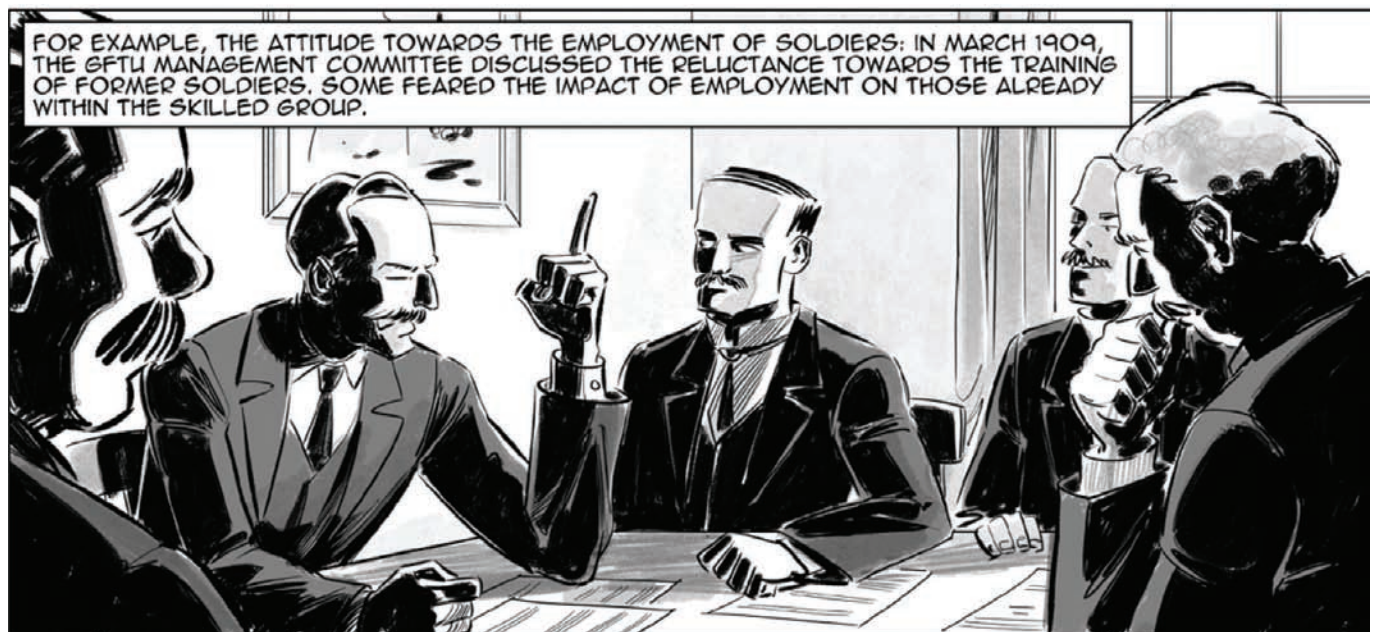
'Manifestations of Warmth': Emotions in Trade Unions

Edda Nicolson, University of Wolverhampton

'May I ask the delegate, if he has any charge to make against the Gasworkers' Union, to make it definitely? At the present moment I am the Chairman of the whole of the organisations in this Federation. If necessary, however, I will defend my own society,' warned Pete Curran, as he presided over the 1909 annual council meeting of the General Federation of Trade Unions. The GFTU were founded to act as a strike fund administrator for affiliated unions to draw on if their members lost pay through industrial action, and Curran had been Chairman of the GFTU since their inception a decade earlier. This defensive reply was his response to a delegate asking the GFTU to look into 'the fact that certain societies were continually trespassing upon the trades of other organisations', which Curran clearly interpreted as an accusation that his union had been poaching members.



If I were one of the GFTU's 700,000 members reading through this report, I would have had no inkling that the above remark was a veiled dig at the Gasworkers' Union until Curran gave his reply. Verbatim reports of their annual meetings were compiled with a fastidious reliability that justified their membership fees and entrenched their legitimacy. However, the undercurrent of the strong emotional fractures still weaves through the words of the eighty-five delegates in 1909. This interests me for two reasons: it challenges the picture of orderliness and uniformity that the GFTU were attempting to paint, and also indicates that there is another layer of emotional communication that can illustrate the dynamism of their organisation.



A panel from the GFTU 120th Anniversary pamphlet. Illustration by Jaime Huxtable.

The idea of looking at the emotions behind the British labour movement is not new. In fact, E. P. Thompson's oft-quoted definition of class includes the idea that a person must 'feel' their class through their shared common experiences. So far, identifying and considering the role of emotions in the early twentieth century labour movement has been largely kept in the background, which probably has something to do with traditional labour historiography fearing that

emotions are some kind of rationality kryptonite. Bringing the history of the working class out from the shadows of Great Kings and Noble Men brought with it the need to make it rational, appropriate, and acceptable. Thankfully, historical feelings and emotions are now being explored in wider depth, and labour historians are joining in.

It isn't simply the odd barbed comment thrown across the room at a delegate that didn't support a call for militancy that highlights the presence of emotions; there is also an emotional rulebook in the culture of trade unions, which was underpinned by the enormous amounts of paperwork that they generated. The GFTU at this time had 120 affiliated societies, which brought together disparate ideologies that ranged from ardent Liberalism to full-throttle revolutionary socialism. Forming and maintaining unity required rules of conduct, which went beyond the usual social norms of the early twentieth century and operated on a particular level of emotional acceptability; no rallying cries for a guillotine were allowed, but certain careful but genuine phrases allowed emotional persuasiveness to enter proceedings. Delegates were 'given hearty welcomes' and assured that the 'feeling and spirit grows' so that 'every part [of the labour movement] becomes stronger'. Dissent was voiced with feelings of 'regret that the conference should consider...', 'astonishment that our Chairman would say...' and annoyance at 'too much humour' being used for serious discussions. There was 'deepest regret' over their Treasurer's illness, which called for 'the sympathy of the whole Conference [to] go out to him' and that the conference 'move... that a letter of sympathy be sent from this Federation' to express their feelings. This collective expression of sympathy through a formal

communication was then voted on and agreed to unanimously, as if the feeling of sympathy had to be legitimised and formalised in order for it to be real. The moral pressure to vote for official sympathy produced a unanimously carried motion.



Curran ended the conference by declaring that 'apart from one or two manifestations of warmth' the conference had been 'the best Conference [they] have had'. I would argue that the 'warmth' Curran could have done without was a key part of how the GFTU brought together such a variety of organisations in search of a common cause. There had to be emotional jostling - feelings of annoyance, pride, acceptance or anger - in order for delegates to voice the opinions and concerns of their unions. That they did so in an acceptable manner, with an emotional phrase book, and an implied framework of acceptability designed not just by their wider social environment, but by their specific trade union culture, highlights the crucial role that collective emotions played in the GFTU.

This is one small case study, with many paths not yet taken. For instance, it seems that referring to fellow delegates as 'brothers' must have been intended to convey familiarity and solidarity, but it is doubtful that Mary Macarthur shared that feeling when she joined the GFTU. I'm intrigued by the colour that emotions add to the fabric of trade unionism, with sub-committees and delegations becoming arenas for enthusiasm, sorrow and hope for change. The potential for emotions history to offer a new insight into what was already a period of profound change is vast.

At least, that's the way it feels to me.

Reflections

Gerry Madden, SWU Executive Member offers some reflections on returning back to social work practice from his retirement.

On the 1st June I returned to practice (one day per week) almost six years after my 'official' retirement and nearly 42 years since I joined the social work profession. The initial context of my return to work was to help with the partial implementation of The Mental Capacity Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. This legislation provides a statutory framework for people who lack capacity to make a decision for themselves and for those who now have capacity but wish to make preparations for a time in the future when they lack capacity. A key part of this framework is what is known as DoLS - Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards. Of course, my return also co-incided with the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic and all the huge consequences that this has had for Social Workers and the environment in which they continue to practice. During the six years that I had been absent from formal practice I was however fortunate to have been able to remain grounded in social work type activities through a variety of opportunities - my role as the Northern Ireland representative on the national Executive of the Social Workers Union allowed me to keep very much in contact with current issues facing Social Workers; facilitating a local men's support group, involvement in welfare rights activity primarily in relation to providing assistance and support for people claiming Personal Independence Payment and, finally, maintaining my social work registration: all of these activities certainly helped ease the transition back into practice.

So, what then are some of my initial reflections almost 4 months after my return to practice? I would highlight the following points as worthy of consideration

1. I approached my return with a certain degree of anxiety but also anticipation. The field of work was an area of practice that had always interested me from my previous experience as an Approved Social Worker over a period of 25 years. Under the new
2. The continuing advances of various technologies as the medium through which Social Workers conduct their activities is something that surprised me a little and it has been very much a question of "teaching an old dog new tricks"! Obviously in the context of the current pandemic, there is a positive aspect to such developments.



At the same time, and without in any way wishing to be characterised as Luddite, I cannot but help feel concerned at the apparent diminishing importance of face-to-face contact with our service users. Working in such a manner clearly runs the risk for individual social workers of becoming isolated and alienated, particularly perhaps for those newly qualified or less experienced.

3. As a counter-point to the comments just made, my brief to-date return to practice has confirmed again for myself the long standing belief of the critical importance of being part of structures that provide support and solidarity for social workers. From this perspective, membership of an organisation such as SWU/BASW is absolutely essential in providing the employment and professional supports, advice and development necessary to both protect individual social workers whilst allowing them to continue to practice to the highest standards of the profession and thereby empower and enable our service users. A very powerful example of this approach has been the recent launch of

the *Good Practice Toolkit* developed by BASW with Bath Spa University and SWU. In the words of John McGowan, General Secretary of SWU *“For Social Workers in practice, it should help you be more informed and empowered to look after yourself better at work; recognise when you need support and how to access it; develop knowledge and skills to influence your organisation; and know your rights and what you should expect from your employer. The Toolkit will also be useful for ... preparing social workers for qualifying and entry into practice and providing continual professional development“*. Enough said!!

To conclude, my reflections on my return to practice are an overall positive experience very much based on the reaffirmation of the place and importance of the social work role in trying to meet the very many varying and complex needs of people today, particularly in a world dominated by Covid 19 and its projected aftermath.

Gerry Madden
Social Worker

The Clare Collection

One hundred Guardian front covers interspersed with three hundred of the best Clare strip cartoons covering the last twenty-five years, as the hysterical collides with the historical.

£15, Hardback.

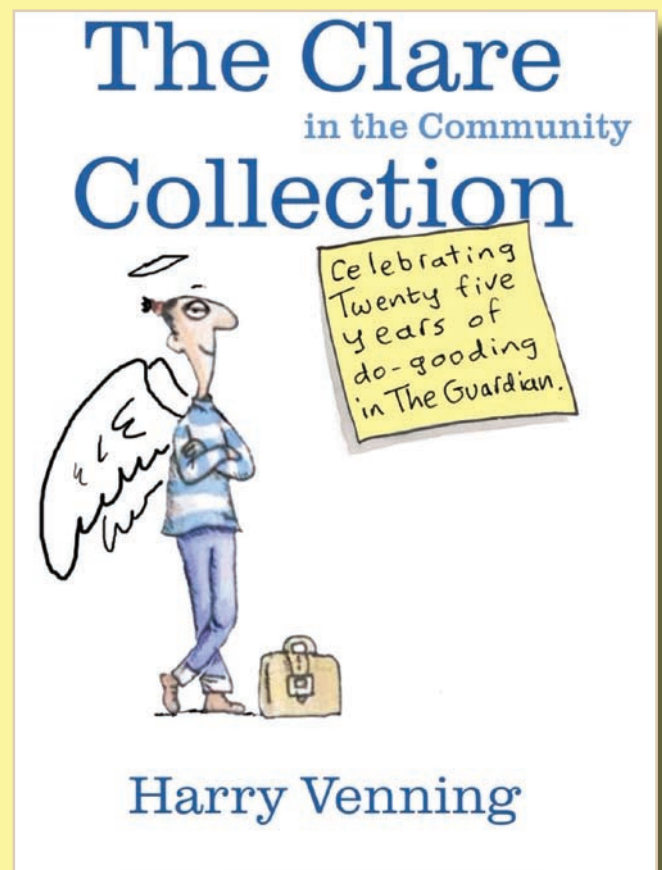
Available from bookshops mid-November, but orders are being taken from 21st October at www.clareinthecommunity.co.uk

Clare in the Community by Harry Venning features every week in the Guardian. Get your Clare goodies here.

www.clareinthecommunity.co.uk

or email

harrymvenning@gmail.com



Only **£25** a year with your present BASW membership (**£10** a year for students)

Every year, the Social Workers Union skilled TU Officers help Social Workers with a range of different situations, from the small and easily resolved, to more significant and prolonged conduct issues. Disciplinary and grievance procedures, including representation at internal hearings – this is only guaranteed if you are a SWU member.

Remember – investigations into professional social work practice and allegations of misconduct – where this is done by your employer, representation is only guaranteed* if you are a member of SWU.

SWU sits on the National Executive of the General Federation of Trade Unions. Have a look at the access you get as a member to GFTU training and development. SWU is one of the fastest growing unions in the UK – be part of the progress.

Being part of a strong growing trade union is a vital and recognised way of successfully being part of the Trade Union movement. Help us campaign for better working conditions, pay and professional recognition. If you want to join SWU or learn more about becoming actively involved as a Union Contact get in touch: carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk or email SWU Admin: louise.wood@swu-union.org.uk.



Belong to a Social Work union that:

- is lobbying MPs and Peers to improve working conditions for social workers.
- partners with organisations to support good working conditions and with opportunities to be active as a SWU Union Contact.
- campaigns to change legislation bills.
- collaborates with external unions and continue to be active through membership of General Federation of Trade Unions and ongoing union campaigns.
- funds the Austerity Action Group and opportunities to get involved.

As a SWU member you get:

- Full guaranteed employment representation*
- Free advice and support from A&R and Union Contacts
- Free financial health check from Lighthouse Group
- 10% off Morrish Solicitors
- General Federation of Trade Unions free training courses
- Discounted training from Avenue Professional Group (Dr Neil Thompson)
- Opportunity to be active as part of the trade union movement
- Monthly Newsletter

**Terms and conditions apply regarding new members and levels of representation*

Please check your membership to continue or opt in to being a SWU Member through BASW membership

SWU can be found on the following:



www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk/



www.swu-union.org.uk



[SWU_UK](https://twitter.com/SWU_UK)