

150 Years Not Out!



1873-1973

ANNUAL REPORT on 2022

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE TRADES UNION COUNCIL

Founded 18 January 1873

150th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

7.00 pm WEDNESDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2023

By Zoom: Meeting ID: 829 0711 7567 Passcode: 488622

AGENDA

- 1. Apologies for Absence**
- 2. Election of Tellers (2)**
- 3. Minutes of the 149th AGM**

4. Annual Report:

- 4.1 President's Address
- 4.2 Secretary's Report
- 4.3 Treasurer's Report
- 4.4 Auditors' Report
- 4.5 Other Reports

5. Election of Officers, EC and Delegates

- 5.1 President:
- 5.2 Secretary:
- 5.3 Treasurer:
- 5.4 Minutes Secretary:
- 5.5 Women's Officer:
- 5.6 Executive Committee (6 additional places)

5.7 Auditors (2)

5.8 Tyne & Wear CATUC (4 places)

5.9 Newcastle & Gateshead TUC CAU Mgt Cttee (4) M Levy, K Maddison (PCS)
(A Lubbock and J Simpkin are ex-officio as Founders)

5.10 Trades Councils Joint Consultative Cttee (1) (none)

5.11 Tyne & Wear May Day Committee (none)

5.12 TUC Annual Women's Conference (none)

5.13 Annual Conference of Trades Union Councils J Simpkin

5.14 Northern Regional TUC delegates and Executive (none)

Nominations for 5.7-5.14 may be received at the AGM.

Nominations Received:

M Levy (UCU)

J Simpkin (Unite)

A Lubbock (Unite)

(none)

(none)

P Ford (USDAW)

R Brown (NEU)

P Rutherford (Unite)

R Murdoch (Unite)

M Levy, J Simpkin,

A Lubbock, P Hill (UCU)

M Levy, K Maddison (PCS)

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE TRADES UNION COUNCIL

Minutes of 149th AGM

Wednesday 2 February 2022

1. Introduction and Attendance

In the enforced absence of the president, Martin Levy, the 149th Annual General Meeting of Newcastle upon Tyne Trades Union Council was chaired by Ron Brown, now representing NEU. This was the second AGM to be held online using Zoom, and Ron welcomed all delegates present, numbering in double figures and from six different trade unions (including a second NEU delegate).

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Lorraine Brown, Paul Ford, Martin Levy and Dave Martin.

3. Tellers

It was agreed that we would have a hand-count when required.

4. Minutes of the 2021 AGM

The Minutes were agreed as a correct record.

5. Annual Report:

The Annual Report had been electronically, and in printed form by Royal Mail, so only additional comments are recorded in the minutes.

President's Address

Ron Brown, as chair of the meeting, read out the president's address as published. The address was accepted.

There followed a lengthy discussion about current industrial issues around the gig economy; trade union representation; bogus self-employment; low pay and the current industrial dispute at one of the four Stuart Delivery depots in the region. One delegate reported how the wealth of the top 1% had grown during the pandemic while the remaining 99% were worse off, taking account of the current inflation rate in particular (CPI 5.4%, RPI 7.5%). The main area of concern was that of precarious workers, similar to Stuart Delivery, many represented by the IWGB which is yet to affiliate to the national TUC.

Secretary's Report

The secretary highlighted the current Covid-19 data (6 million positive tests and 10,000 deaths since Christmas Eve (2021)). The secretary's report was accepted.

Treasurer's and Auditors' Reports

The Treasurer explained the details in the accounts: affiliations were similar to previous years while the pandemic had made the process more complex. Donations were down on the previous year.

The auditors reported that the treasurer had provided them with the detailed accounts information electronically. They accepted the treasurer's report as a true and correct representation of the accounts. The meeting accepted both the auditors' report and the treasurer's report.

Tyne & Wear County Association of Trades Union Councils/Northern Regional TUC

Delegates explained that events on the street have been limited due to Covid-19 but street launch events for Tyne and Wear Needs a Pay Rise went ahead in Sunderland and Newcastle. Work is ongoing to rebuild Gateshead TUC. It is likely that North Tyneside and South Tyneside will also need assistance with affiliations. Newcastle TUC's delegates to the Northern Regional TUC still need to be considered.

The printed and oral reports were accepted.

Cultural Subcommittee

There was a brief oral report on the developments of local cultural compact and building links to various parts of the sector. Again, the impact of Covid-19 has limited this industrial sector in relation to live performances during parts of the year. It was also pointed out that the subcommittee was looking for the support and involvement of the affiliated branches. The printed and oral reports were accepted by the meeting.

Tyne & Wear May Day Committee

Plans for 2022 (Saturday 30 April) have started and speakers have been approached. An initial meeting of the Committee was held 8 December 2021, but due to the Omicron variant the impact on plans is now unpredictable. The written and oral reports were accepted by the meeting.

Trades Union Councils Annual Conference

The 2021 Trades Council Conference was again due to be held in Leicester, but due to Covid-19 was held on Zoom with all delegates having access online. All the motions will be used by the TUCJCC to develop the work plan. The report was accepted.

People's Press Printing Society, North East People's Assembly Against Austerity, Wallsend Memorial Hall and People's Centre Board

The printed reports were accepted by the meeting.

Newcastle Unites

Events at the Kill the Bill event were reported. The printed report was accepted by the meeting.

Electronic Media

The website needs further work on keeping it up to date. The printed report was accepted by the meeting.

Newcastle & Gateshead Centre Against Unemployment

Alan Lubbock gave an oral report. The work of the CAU has been paused due to Covid-19, but the CAU hopes to return soon, possibly online. The report was accepted.

6. Election of Officers

Delegates were elected to posts as follows:

President: Martin Levy

Secretary: Jim Simpkin

Treasurer: Alan Lubbock

Minutes Secretary: vacant

Women's Officer: vacant

Executive: Martin Levy, Jim Simpkin, Alan Lubbock, Ron Brown and Paul Ford.

Auditors: Bob Murdoch, Peter Rutherford.

CATUC delegates: Martin Levy, Jim Simpkin, Alan Lubbock and Peter Hill.

Newcastle & Gateshead CAU Management Committee: Martin Levy, Keith Maddison and Andy Robertson (Newcastle TUC Group classification). Alan Lubbock and Jim Simpkin did not require election due to their status as Founder members.

Trades Union Councils Joint Consultative Committee: no nominations. Mandy Penellum has resigned, so an election is pending.

Tyne & Wear May Day Committee: Martin Levy, Jim Simpkin, and Ron Brown.

Annual Conference of Trades Union Councils delegate: Jim Simpkin.

TUC Women's Conference: vacant.

Regional TUC: Martin Levy (also Regional Executive) and Jim Simpkin.

7. Amendments to Rules: none submitted.

REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1 FEBRUARY 2023

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8. People's Press Printing Society (PPPS)
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Other AGM Reports will be presented to the meeting.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS: Martin Levy (UCU Northumbria University)

In opening this Annual General Meeting I must first pay tribute to our founding fathers – I am assuming that they were all men – who established the Newcastle & Gateshead Trades Council at a meeting at the *Flying Horse Inn* in the Groat Market 150 years ago, on Saturday 18 January 1873. This was not the first trades council in Britain – there were already at least 19 others – but we are indebted to the efforts of those clear-sighted trade unionists, as well



as the many who followed them, that Newcastle upon Tyne Trades Union Council is here today. The venue of that meeting, now occupied by the Athena Takeaway, looks very unprepossessing, but we should think about a campaign to get a blue plaque put on the wall.

The *Centenary History* of the Trades Council was published in 1973. That was well before my time, since I have only been involved with Newcastle TUC since the late 1980s; but there may be delegates present who know how that history came to be written. It's a goldmine of information, revealing how the Trades Council throughout sought both to play a coordinating role among trade union branches in the city, and to campaign on issues such as

unemployment, peace and apartheid in South Africa. It was also at loggerheads with the TUC on more than one occasion.

Of course, the last 50 years should also not be ignored. At the 125th anniversary, addressed by our friend John Creaby, there was a suggestion that the history should be updated. The additions would have to include: the campaign in support of the Grunwick strikers in London; the support for the miners during the great 1984-85 strike; the establishment of the first centre against unemployment in Britain; and the purchase of what our late president Ron Taylor called "that shitty little building" in the Cloth Market.

The last 45 years have also seen a process of retrenchment by the trade union movement, and Newcastle TUC has not been immune to that: whole industries have disappeared; trade unions have lost millions of members; mergers of unions and branches have taken place; and for much of that period there has been an erosion of class consciousness. Eventually, we had to sell the building (as luck would have it, shortly before the Covid pandemic, which would have wiped us out as an organisation). We now have many fewer branches and members affiliated than when I joined the Trades Council, and consequently it limits what we can do. We need young, active blood, of diverse backgrounds, to take over from the white, retired, male leadership in which I count myself.

Nonetheless our Trades Council is still here, while others have shut down, and we are still achieving much, as this Annual Report shows. But we need to do much more; and now, more than at any point since the 1990s, we have the opportunity to play the role which the labour movement in our city so desperately needs.

Following the Covid pandemic, Britain's working class stands at a conjunction of five crises: the cost of living, the environment, public services, political representation and peace. Of course these are all linked, and the common factor behind all of them is the determination by our monopoly capitalist ruling class, along with the same class in other imperialist countries, to maintain profit levels and domination of the world economy, and to make the working classes pay for the costs of handling the pandemic.

That is why there is a drive by employers to destroy agreed working conditions and to hold down pay. That is why our public services, like the NHS, are being underfunded and prepared for privatisation. That is why there is no real attempt to tackle the causes of global warming, which will cause untold destruction, will hit poor people the most, and is already contributing to mass migration. That is why there are always government funds for military production and for dangerous adventures like the Ukraine war, risking the possibility of global annihilation, but apparently no funds to pay for public services and decent pay for the workers. And that is why there is also a crisis of political representation – a Conservative

government representing the narrowest interests in society and riddled with incompetence and corruption; a mass media controlled, more than ever before, by the ruling class, so that dissenting voices are not heard and people like Jeremy Corbyn are demonised; and a pro-NATO, pro-big business, pro-imperialist Labour leadership under Kier Starmer, and brooking no dissent from Labour MPs.

For those of us who remember the 1970s, or even the 1980s, the current industrial situation gives real cause for optimism that, as Mick Lynch of the RMT said, “the working class is back.” Workers have rumbled the ruling class, and are saying that enough is enough, they don’t want to be treated like dirt any more. They are learning confidence in their own strength, solidarity and an understanding that there is a common enemy, albeit focused on the Tory government rather than the ruling class itself. It has been a real honour for me, after many years of pessimism in the labour movement, to stand with members of RMT, ASLEF, Unite, CWU, UCU and PCS on picket lines.

Newcastle TUC is coming into its own again in building solidarity, and we have taken the step, in conjunction with the Tyne & Wear CATUC, and the North East People’s Assembly, to call our own demonstration of solidarity and against the latest anti-strike attempt by the government, on Saturday 18 February. Be there! We have also turned the March 1 celebration of our 150th anniversary at the Tyneside Irish Centre into a benefit for trade union hardship funds.



But there is still a long way to go. While unions like Unite have been able to win victories at individual employers in the private sector, the big national disputes are going to be tough. We are in the fight of our lives, and winning is going to require the widest solidarity and support, because the government has set its face against conceding and even Labour is saying the money is not there. But they can be beaten – that was done in the 1970s and it can be done today. However, any victory will be temporary without: a deepening of class consciousness and a recognition that this is a struggle with our monopoly capitalist class, not just the government; an understanding of the nature of imperialism, a rejection of NATO and other imperialist alliances like AUKUS; and an appreciation that the labour movement needs a political vehicle to achieve its aims and that there will be no long-term solution without moving in a socialist direction. Along the way, the trade union movement will have to have the confidence and resolve to tackle the anti-union laws head-on.

SECRETARY’S REPORT: Jim Simpkin (Unite Tyneside EEES Branch)

Covid-19

Newcastle Trades Council meetings have continued to take place on Zoom, with some outdoor campaigning as rules permitted. While numbers of Covid cases and deaths have fallen they have not completely gone away and the Newcastle upon Tyne area is still seeing one or two deaths a week.

Inflation

Inflation has impacted many people on low or fixed incomes (pensioners, benefit claimants, low paid workers and students). In September 2021 the CPI rate was 3.1%, and this was used for increases in pensions and benefits in April 2022. The CPI rate in fact reached 9% in April 2022, followed by 10%+ for the rest of the year. The RPI measure of inflation has typically been a few points higher.

Energy

This time last year the motion 'Public Ownership of Energy' was agreed as our submission to TUC Northern Region Annual Conference, where it was overwhelmingly supported. It was also submitted to the Tyne & Wear CATUC, from which it was sent to the Trades Union Councils Conference in June.

Current reports suggest that the average household cost of electricity and gas will reach £3,000 per annum in April 2023, a three-fold increase in around two years. In 2021 electricity prices increased by 8% in April and another 8% in October, followed by 50% in April 2022 and an expected increase of 80% in October 2022, later ameliorated by various support measures.

These rises have impacted households and small businesses, such as takeaway hot food, restaurants, pubs and food processors (eg bakeries), driving up costs and prices. These are the drivers we have seen in the second half of 2022 to the cost-of-living crisis and increased demand at foodbanks.

Between 2012 and 2020 the average wholesale market price of electricity was around £50 per MWh. In recent weeks it has been between £100 and £250 per MWh. However, just before Christmas 2022, when wind generation was minimal, there were spikes to more than £1,000 per MWh. This is clearly not the cost of generation. In the last three or four years the capacity of the interconnectors to Ireland and Europe has doubled. You have to ask the question whether the UK market has been impacted by reduced nuclear generation in France due to maintenance work.

On the hottest day of the year, last summer, coal was being used to generate electricity, probably at West Burton A, Ratcliffe-on-Soar or Drax. In recent weeks at least two of these three stations have been using coal to generate electricity.

Should we not be investing in renewables with a different generation profile, ie tidal, such as Swansea Bay, Severn Barrage, Mersey Barrage etc? There was a small project team on this in the Cunard building on the Liverpool waterfront in the early 1990s when the John Major government was in the process of privatising the electricity industry. There have been two further failed attempts since, led by Peel Ports.

Tidal generation does not depend directly on sunlight or wind.

Industrial Disputes

At the peak of the Covid pandemic there were pay cuts or freezes. Since then there has been an increase of 500,000 in the total number of economically inactive workers, likely due to early retirement. As many key workers, feeling undervalued, have moved to less stressful and better-paid jobs, many workplaces now have a staff recruitment/retention problem while unemployment appears to be at a low level.

These factors, taken together with the rate of inflation and the employers' assault on jobs and working conditions, help to explain the increase in the number of industrial disputes throughout 2022. However, while there have been wage rises of more than 10% in the private sector, workers in the public sector have been offered or received about half that. Locally workers have been in national disputes and action as follows:

- NEU took extended strike action at the Newcastle High School for Girls.
- RMT, TSSA, ASLEF and UNITE have been in dispute at Network Rail and the train operating companies.
- CWU has been taking industrial action at Royal Mail, Post Office, BT and Openreach, though a settlement was reached at BT/Openreach.
- UCU has ongoing national industrial disputes at universities, and also at a number of colleges.
- NUJ members at Reach plc (Newcastle Chronicle & Journal) struck last year and secured an improved pay offer, though still falling short of inflation.
- GMB, UNISON and UNITE have been taking industrial action at a number of ambulance trusts.
- UNITE members at Shelter struck for two weeks and secured an improved pay offer in December.

- RCN members have been taking industrial action at various trusts, including both the Newcastle Hospitals.
- PCS members have been on strike locally at the DVSA and the RPA; all DWP members nationally will be out on February 1.
- NEU has announced strike days starting on the 1 February nationwide, followed by various regional days adding up to four days throughout February and March 2023.



While these national disputes have been reported, a number of local disputes have gone under the radar of much of the press. Local bus companies, refuse workers and manufacturing plants have all seen increases above 10%. However, we have also had a number of full/partial closures, hit by the cost-of-living crisis.

Newcastle TUC delegates have visited many of the local picket lines, to show support for the trade union membership in dispute. Prior to Christmas 2022 the Trades Council handed over donations, of £500 each, to the RMT and CWU hardship funds.

Key events at monthly meetings and in between

- March 2022: we submitted an emergency motion on the P&O Sackings to the TUC Annual Regional Conference. The Actavo Scaffolders dispute at Scunthorpe steelworks and the US tornado were also discussed.
- April: a special full council took place on 20 April to vote in the election for the TUCJCC regional representative. Simon Dixon (Berwick TUC) was supported by a narrow majority.
- June: we did campaigning work in the build-up to the TUC demonstration, 'We Demand Better', on 18 June. We made a successful bid to the Trades Councils' Development Fund for support to assist covering transport costs for people attending that demonstration (on the basis of funds also provided by the Trades Council itself and the North East People's Assembly). In June we also affiliated to Strike Map (<https://www.strikemap.org>), which has been playing a terrific role in publicising strikes and picket lines.
- July: a memorial event for Peter Burnett, former secretary of Newcastle TUC, took place at the Bridge Hotel on July 8. The event was well attended and a full report was given in September.
- September: the TUC trades councils' survey on a Just Transition was discussed.
- October: the Trades Council agreed to buy a battery-powered PA system for use at local rallies. On 14 October we took part in the TUC day of action over 'We Demand Better', also promoting Tyne & Wear Needs a Pay Rise.
- December: the Enough is Enough rally and the Climate Justice event the previous month were reported.
- January 2023: Dave King RMT gave a report on the ongoing dispute. The Trades Council agreed to: (1) write to local MPs about supporting all disputes; (2) hold street stalls in support of striking workers and to build up to a public rally on a Saturday in February; and (3) use the occasion of the Trades Council's 150th anniversary for a celebration/fund-raiser for striking workers on 1 March. A special Executive meeting was held to progress these plans. The January Full Council meeting also agreed a donation of £500 to support Culture Matters' 2023 Bread & Roses poetry award; affiliated branches will also be asked to contribute.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF TRADES UNION COUNCILS 2022: Jim Simpkin

The Conference took place at the Hilton Hotel, Leicester (near junction 21 of the M1) on the weekend of 11/12 June 2022. Because of Covid risks, the fire exit doors were kept open to improve air circulation. The number of delegates, around 60, was down on pre-Covid levels. While the mix of groups was good, age was still a major factor.

Socially, on the Friday evening there was a talk on '150 Years of Leicester Trades Council', along with a buffet. The clothing industry played a major part in that trades council's history. On the Saturday there was a performance by Banner Theatre of 'Saltley Gate to Party Gate'.

Main conference speakers were Lee Baron, Midlands TUC regional secretary and AN Other on current clothing industry issues; Barry Gardiner MP and Trevor Stephens (Community) on 'fire & rehire'.

Simon Dixon had been elected as the TUCJCC representative for the Northern region but was not available due to Covid. Kevin Allsop (Bolton TUC) had been elected as the TUCJCC representative for the North-West Region.

The usual mix of motions and four emergency motions were discussed including, from Tyne & Wear, 'Worker's Rights and Minimum Wage' and 'Public Ownership of Energy'.

Peter Billington (Lancashire) was elected as the Congress delegate and Motion 1, 'Organise the Unorganised – Linking with Trades Councils', was selected as the motion to go forward to Congress (carried as Congress motion 66).

Motions

- 1 Organise the Unorganised – Linking with Trades Councils (South Yorkshire CATUC)
Amendment: Somerset CATUC
- 2 A Victory for One is a Victory for All: Sharing Success (Chesterfield TUC)
Amendment: Tyne and Wear CATUC
- 3 Rail Industry Campaigns (Essex CATUC)
- 4 Urgent Union Action Needed to Stop Workplace Airborne Transmission of Covid-19 (GLATUC)
Amendment: Tyne and Wear CATUC
- 5 Workers Need a Pay Rise (Coventry TUC)
- 6 Worker's Rights and Minimum Wage (Tyne and Wear CATUC)
- 7 Trade Unions, Climate Jobs, and a Green Industrial Revolution with Social Justice (Lancashire CATUC)
Amendment: Somerset CATUC
- 8 No to Extortionate Energy Bill Price Rises – Nationalise the Gas and Electric Companies Now! (South Yorkshire CATUC)
Amendment: Berkshire CATUC
- 9 Public Ownership of Energy (Tyne and Wear CATUC)
- 10 State Pensions and Retirement Age (West Yorkshire CATUC)
Amendment: West Yorkshire CATUC
- 11 Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (West Yorkshire CATUC)
- 12 The 'Trojan Horse Affair' (Lancashire CATUC)
- 13 (EM1) Release of the President of the Russian Trade Union Courier Kirill Ukraintsev (Greater Manchester CATUC)
- 14 (EM2) Protecting our Democratic Rights to Picket in an Era of Increasing Police Power (Greater Manchester CATUC)
- 15 (EM3) Rail Strikes (Islington TUC)
- 16 (EM4) Solidarity with Kurds – Stop Turkey's Invasion of Northern Iraq and Syria – Unproscribe the PKK (South Yorkshire CATUC)
- 17 Statement: Government Rwanda Removal Policy (TUCJCC)

TYNE AND WEAR COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF TRADES UNION COUNCILS: Martin Levy, Jim Simpkin, Alan Lubbock (Unite Tyneside EEES) and Peter Hill (UCU Northumbria University)

CATUC meetings have now settled to approximately fortnightly, again by Zoom (using Newcastle TUC's paid Zoom account), and lasting for about 1 and 1/2 hours on average. On almost every occasion the meetings have been opened with a brief report on the current industrial and political situation, followed by discussion. Given what has happened over the last year, this has provided a very useful exchange of views.

Meetings have also heard reports from the Northern Region TUC, the North East People's Assembly (NEPA), various other campaigns, and individual trades councils. Sunderland TUC, like ourselves, is very active and meets face-to-face; Gateshead at last got enough affiliations to register with the TUC in 2022, but still needs a lot of support; we had no reports from North Tyneside and South Tyneside TUCs, and therefore don't know to what extent they are functioning.

The CATUC sent a motion on the Leamside Line, and an emergency on Ukraine, to the TUC Regional Annual Conference; and motions on 'Workers Rights and Minimum Wage' and 'Public Ownership of Energy' to the 2022 Trades Councils Annual Conference. Steve Hansom, secretary of Sunderland TUC, was elected as CATUC delegate to the latter conference, but at the last minute had to cancel, so the CATUC's proposals had to be picked up by Jim Simpkin.

In an attempt to reboot the Tyne & Wear Needs a Pay Rise campaign, a new leaflet was produced in June, with copies distributed via a stall at the Jarrow Rebel Town Festival, by NEPA at its stall at the Durham Miners' Gala, and by Newcastle TUC later in the year (in conjunction with the TUC's 'We Demand Better' campaign). Some copies were also taken by the Unite Community branch. However, it has been difficult to achieve any sustained momentum.

In July, following a presentation by James Schneider, the CATUC affiliated to We All Want to Just Stop Oil, but there is very little to show from this, except a couple of email messages from a local Just Stop Oil activist.

The CATUC has also sought to facilitate a public meeting in defence of Julian Assange, and a Sunderland meeting in the 'We Demand Better' campaign, but so far without success.

In January 2022, Mandy Penellum stepped down as Northern Regional representative on the Trades Union Councils Joint Consultative Committee (TUCJCC). No candidates came forward in response to the first call for nominations, so when the deadline was extended the CATUC contacted as many trades councils as possible to find a volunteer. There was an unfortunate by-product of this when, in the election, the CATUC voted for Simon Dixon rather than Louise Atkinson, the preferred candidate of then CATUC president, Dave Alan. Dave immediately resigned from the CATUC, being replaced by Jim Simpkin as acting president.

Since the Trades Councils Conference, the CATUC has been seeking to get Simon to convene a Trades Councils Regional Forum, and has offered the use of Newcastle TUC's Zoom account. Logistical problems have delayed this, but it is hoped that there will be a meeting soon. Meanwhile, the word (unofficially) from the TUCJCC is that the requirement for Conference motions to be submitted by CATUCs (where they exist) is likely to be dropped from 2024 onwards, although CATUCs will be allowed to continue to exist, should they want to.

NORTHERN REGIONAL TRADES UNION CONGRESS: Martin Levy and Jim Simpkin

The Northern Region TUC Annual Conference, cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid crisis, returned on 26 March 2022, as an in-person event at the Newcastle Crowne Plaza hotel but with Martin Levy and Unite regional secretary Karen Reay participating by Zoom. All motions were agreed, including Newcastle TUC's 'Public Ownership of Energy' and the emergency 'P&O Sackings', the CATUC's 'Leamside Line' and its emergency on 'Ukraine', and Gateshead TUC's 'Derwentside Immigration Removal Centre'. Other motions included a focus on the cost-of-living crisis, fighting for higher pay, the New Deal for Workers and

Equality in the Creative and Cultural Sector. All have been incorporated into the Regional TUC's work programme. At the conference Martin Levy was re-elected to the Regional Executive.

Apart from at the Conference, the Executive met four times in 2022 (more recently in hybrid form) and has been very useful, not only for the reports from the regional secretary and the various groups and fora, but also for the reports from different unions on ballot and action plans. The TUC's 'We Demand Better' campaign has featured prominently in the meetings.

At the 16 November Executive meeting, it was announced that the 2023 Regional Conference will again be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, on 25 March. At the same meeting there was a presentation from Mel Kakkar of the No to Hassockfield campaign. Due to personal circumstances, Martin Levy was unable to attend the Executive meeting on 17 January 2023, but it is understood that Paul Nowak, the new general secretary of the TUC, addressed the meeting, and that plans were made for a march and rally in Newcastle on 1 February, in conjunction with the strikes by PCS, NEU, UCU, RMT and ASLEF on that day, and in protest at the government's Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill.

CULTURAL SUBCOMMITTEE: Mike Quille (Unison Newcastle City Council)

The subcommittee was set up in 2019, but has now been wound up. Its purpose was to take forward the aim of the Trades Council to promote "suitable cultural, educational, social and sports facilities for all working people". It met a few times during the early part of 2022, and the Trades Council circulated its 'Protect, Share and Create' manifesto, but unfortunately no branches responded to the request for interaction. However, the objectives of the subcommittee can now be effectively pursued through the cultural working group attached to the Regional TUC Executive.

A major success from the subcommittee's work has been the Trades Council's involvement with the Newcastle Cultural Compact, which was set up in response to the Arts Council England's initiative "to bring together local authorities, businesses, education providers, cultural and community leaders, driven by a shared ambition for culture and place, to co-design and deliver a vision for culture within a place." I have represented the Trades Council on the Culture Compact for the last three years, and it is now re-forming itself as a co-operative, called Newcastle Creates, <https://www.newcastlecreates.co.uk/>. This is in line with one of its fundamental aims, heavily promoted by us in alliance with other progressive elements on the Compact, which is to increase cultural democracy in Newcastle by involving more citizens in initiatives to widen access to cultural experiences and improve the terms and conditions of employed and self-employed workers in the cultural industries.

Following several discussions involving myself, Martin Levy (on behalf of the Trades Council), Liz Blackshaw (TUC regional secretary), Dominic Bascombe (Equity regional secretary) and members of Newcastle Creates, it has been agreed that Liz will sit on the Newcastle Creates as a Director. Furthermore, it is planned for Liz to take the lead on the strand of work relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity. This is the most relevant strand to the labour movement's policy position in motions passed at regional conferences and also the 'Protect, Share and Create' paper. Dominic is drafting a new version of a charter, and the plan is for Liz to promote our policy position within the co-operative. The experience can then be used as a model for more engagement by the labour movement in cultural decision-making by partnerships across the region. While Newcastle Creates is only Newcastle-based, and the Trades Council has played a major role in getting to this point, neither I nor anyone else from the Trades Council would have the necessary connections, status and time to play an effective role as a director. Furthermore, Liz has given us an undertaking that, as well reporting to the Regional TUC executive, she will report directly to the Trades Council.

In order to strengthen our position and secure backing within Newcastle Creates, we need trade unionists to join as members, and local branches to have a representative on the co-op. It is particularly important that cultural unions have representatives. Membership is free.

TYNE & WEAR MAY DAY COMMITTEE:

Martin Levy, Ron Brown (NEU) and Jim Simpkin

In 2022 the Tyne & Wear May Day celebrations were at last held again in person. On Friday 29 April, there was a social at the Tyneside Irish Centre, with entertainment from the Belta Reivers. The following day the usual march and rally were held, assembling in Exhibition Park (despite a lack of permission from Urban Green), with the rally at Grey's Monument. Main speakers at the rally, consistent with the developing industrial and international situations, were: Liz Blackshaw, TUC Northern Region secretary; Alex Gordon, RMT president; Daniel Kebede, NEU president; Andrew Murray, Stop the War Coalition vice-president; and Ben Chacko, *Morning Star* editor. Music at the rally was provided by Bethany Elen Coyle and Ron Brown. The usual glossy brochure, in full colour, was produced.

The May Day Committee has been strengthened by invitations, but still needs more activists involved. At its meeting in December 2022, the Committee agreed that Vin Wynne and Martin Levy should be joint chairs. Plans have also been made for 2023: the march and rally will be held on Saturday 29 April, and will be followed by a social at the Tyneside Irish Centre. It is hoped that representatives of trade unions currently involved in struggle will be able to accept the committee's invitation to participate.

PEOPLE'S PRESS PRINTING SOCIETY (PPPS): Martin Levy

The *Morning Star*, published by the PPPS, is still alive and kicking – which is just as well given the surge of industrial action of 2022 and the increasingly hysterical propaganda being deployed by ministers and mainstream media pundits against nurses, ambulance workers, posties, railway workers and many more.

However, from the start of 2023 the PPPS has had to raise the price of the daily paper to £1.30 and the weekend paper to £1.70. Because of the hardship people are suffering due to inflation, this was not a decision taken lightly. However, the paper is also affected by rising costs of energy and newsprint – the latter because paper mills have been converting to cardboard production for packaging, and because Russia, a big producer, has been hit with sanctions.

In addition, although digital sales rose significantly during the pandemic, paper sales plummeted because of lockdowns, including the closure of union offices, and have not yet recovered. In rough terms, print sales have dropped by £220,000 a year, but digital sales have risen only by £170,000.

Work continues to rebuild paper sales, and that includes the free copies given out as promotions at the 2022 Durham Miners Gala (3,000), Tolpuddle and other labour and progressive movement events, including national demonstrations. The PPPS has also agreed, in solidarity, to provide free copies, when ordered, for workers on picket lines, and some of these have got through to UCU, RMT and CWU members locally.

The £18,000 monthly target for the People's Press Fighting Fund, to which Newcastle TUC contributes, is essential for filling the gap between income and expenditure; and events are organised around the country to raise moneys for that. At the time of writing, traditional Burns Suppers are being held, the Tyneside one being due to take place at the Irish Centre on 10 February.

As in the past, Newcastle TUC placed greetings adverts for May Day, the Durham Miners' Gala, the Labour Party conference, the TUC and at New Year.

NORTH EAST PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY AGAINST AUSTERITY (NEPA):

Martin Levy

With the reduced intensity of the Covid pandemic, and the accelerating cost-of-living crisis, NEPA has had a busy year, including:

- A protest at Grey's Monument on 15.01.22 as part of a national day of action against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

- As part of the 'We Can't Pay for the Crisis' nation-wide People's Assembly days of action, further protests at Grey's Monument on Saturdays 12 February, 5 March and 2 April.
- A further protest, 'No to Rising Prices & Falling Wages!', joint with Enough is Enough!, at Grey's Monument on Saturday 1 October
- Support for the SOS NHS Newcastle demonstration on 26 February and several 'No to Hassockfield' protests.
- NEPA 'Building the Fightback' open meetings on 19 May, 4 July and 8 September.
- Support for the national People's Assembly Big Night Out in Durham on Friday 8 July, the eve of the Durham Miners' Gala, and then a stall at the Gala itself.
- A fund-raiser for striking workers, 'Strikes, Solidarity and Song', at the Tyneside Irish Centre on Saturday 15 October.
- A coach from Newcastle to the People's Assembly national demonstration in London on Saturday 5 November.

During 2022, the national People's Assembly went over to an individual membership system. This has led to strengthening of the Teesside and Durham groups and the establishment on new groups in Darlington and north Northumberland. A PA national conference took place on Saturday 14 January 2023; and the NEPA AGM on Monday 23 January elected an expanded steering committee.

NEWCASTLE UNITES: Martin Levy

In 2022 Newcastle Unites:

- cooperated with Stand Up to Racism – North East (SUTR-NE) in sending a coach to the UN Anti-Racism Day protest in Glasgow on 19 March;
- supported the 'Keep Newcastle Fascist Free' counter-protest to the North East Frontline Patriots on Saturday 23 April;
- supported demonstrations against the Hassockfield Immigration Prison on several occasions;
- cooperated with SUTR-NE on a vigil on Wednesday 25 May, to mark the second anniversary of George Floyd's murder;
- supported the 'Stop Rwanda Detention' rally on Tuesday 14 June, the Refugee Week rally on Saturday 25 June, and the 'Safe Passage, not Rwanda Flights' rally on Saturday 3 September – all at Grey's Monument;
- participated in the Anti-Racist Bloc at the Durham Miners' Gala on 9 July;
- supported the Love Music Hate Racism event at World Headquarters on 29 October; and
- put its name to the SUTR/TUC conference, 'Building Anti-Racist Workplaces' in London on Saturday 4 February 2023.

The planned unity carnival was put off until the autumn, and then cancelled. Currently, Newcastle Unites is again working with SUTR-NE over the 2023 UN Anti-Racism Day protest in Glasgow. Newcastle TUC has agreed a donation towards the cost of the coach.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS: Martin Levy and Paul Ford (USDAW)

Much remains still to be done with the Trades Council's web site, which is now very outdated. However, regular email messages have been circulated about local picket lines, and Mailchimp bulletins were sent out on 22 February and 16 June, including solidarity messages, the Cultural Subcommittee's 'Protect, Share and Create' document, and information about the Peter Burnett memorial meeting, the Durham Miners' Gala and other local labour and progressive movement events.

The Trades Council's Facebook page has been very active, including posts (sometimes repeatedly), with photos, supporting the following groups of striking workers:

- CWU members on picket lines at Royal Mail Team Valley sorting office and the West Denton, Gosforth and Doxford Park delivery offices and at the BT Customer Care Centre in Gosforth;

- RMT and ASLEF members at picket lines at Newcastle Central Station and Network Rail, Askew Road, in Gateshead;
- UCU members picketing Newcastle College and Northumbria and Newcastle Universities;
- NUJ members, on strike at Reach plc;
- PCS members picketing the DVSA in Gosforth;
- RCN members picketing the RVI and the Freeman Hospital;
- Unite members at First North West in Manchester, Actavo on Teesside, NSK at Peterlee, Venator in Hartlepool, and Shelter in Newcastle;
- Walthamstow refuse workers and cleansers, members of GMB and Unite; and
- RMT cleaner members in South-East England.

Among these were a few shares from other pages. Other shares include: statements from the CWU and the RMT; the petition to save P&O seafarers' jobs, and publicity for

- the 'Kill the Bill' day of action in January 2022,
- the Marx Memorial Library's online course, 'Trade Unions, Class and Power',
- Tyne & Wear May Day,
- The Jarrow Rebel Town Festival,
- leafleting in preparation for the TUC's 'We Demand Better' demonstration in July and as part of the TUC day of action in October,
- the People's Assembly demonstration in London on 5 November,
- the Amazon 'wildcat' sit-down in Essex, the TUC's Megaphone campaign for Amazon workers, and the strike by GMB members at Amazon's Coventry depot,
- the 2022 Bread & Roses poetry award from Culture Matters, and
- the Trades Council's donations to the RMT and CWU hardship funds.

STOP THE WAR COALITION CONFERENCE, 21 JANUARY 2023: THE WORLD AT WAR: Ron Brown

Newcastle TUC affiliated to the Stop the War Coalition in 2022, and delegated me to attend the above conference. There were two main sessions and four breakout sessions.

In the main sessions there were repeated calls for an end to the war in Ukraine: Russian troops out, an end to western material support to Ukraine and peaceful settlement through negotiations. Various speakers pointed out that this is a proxy war between the US and Russia that could spill over into a global conflict. Andrew Murray (StW Deputy President) said that never before at a StW conference could we have said we are on the brink of World War 3. Kate Hudson (general secretary, CND) highlighted the drive toward a nuclear war and echoed other speakers in saying that the global dynamic leading this is the US's determination to maintain its hegemony.

Other main themes included:

- repeated calls for rescinding last year's TUC conference motion supporting increased spending on 'defence' production;
- 'Welfare not Warfare' – after over 10 years of austerity we are told there is no money for wages and public services but there is always money for defence spending, which the UK government is looking to increase from 2% to 3% of GDP;
- the inability of the anti-war movement currently to get representation in Parliament due to Kier Starmer's policy of removing the whip from Labour MPs who stand on a StW platform. Silenced anti-war MPs need a strong anti-war movement to embolden them.

The focuses of the first two breakout sessions were 'AUKUS and the coming ward on China' and 'Oil, War and the Climate Crisis'. I attended the session on AUKUS. Warren Smith (Australian Maritime Union) highlighted the history of trade unionists disrupting war efforts and praised the RMT for joint campaigning around AUKUS. This theme was picked up in the final plenary, later, by Jose Nivo (CALP Genoa Docker) who received a standing ovation after explaining how dock workers and members of the local community in Genoa blocked the shipment of generators to Saudi Arabia for use in the war in Yemen.

The US and UK are forcing Australia to spend \$171bn on nuclear warheads. The AUKUS alliance is not defensive. It's an escalation of aggression toward China, driven by

US imperialism. Jenny Clegg explained that the East-Asia region is set to take over the EU economically. Militarisation of the region is about containing China but is equally about disrupting regional progress and growth. Whilst the UN recognises Taiwan as part of China, the US is pouring resources into Taiwan in order to prepare it for China's 'invasion'. A global NATO is developing with Japan being brought in with AUKUS.

The focuses of the second two breakout sessions were 'Welfare not Warfare: Defence Spending and the Jobs Myth' and 'War, Refugees and Islamophobia.' I attended the 'Welfare not Warfare' session. Andrew Feinstein (Shadow World Investigations) explained that trade in arms accounts for 40% of corruption in all world trade. Liz Wheatley (Unison) said that workers in the defence industry didn't go into their professions to become 'defence workers'. They are skilled engineers. Economic arguments in favour of arms production fall flat. Arms jobs are inefficient. Wages are a small proportion of what is laid out and production costs mean that each individual job costs millions more than socially useful jobs. The Lucas Plan was discussed. Andrew Murray said that this is a favourable moment to develop the argument for arms diversification due to the cost-of-living crisis.

A strategy is needed to provide alternative appropriate jobs that will employ the skills of current arms industry workers and we can't simply make arguments like 'we should invest the money in healthcare instead' – as useful as that would be.

Jeremy Corbyn attended the main plenary after returning from Washington that afternoon where he had been with people who are developing a campaign in support of Julian Assange. Assange will be charged with espionage by the US government if he is extradited – although he is not guilty of this. Alex Gordon (RMT president) argued that if a war against China happens it will not boost jobs in Australia or Barrow-in-Furness, it will destroy the world. Lindsey German appealed for people to get union branches to affiliate to StW, get the TUC motion rescinded and attend the StW demonstration in London on 25 February.

TREASURER'S REPORT ON 2022

A report will be presented to the meeting.

AUDITORS' REPORT

A report will be presented to the meeting.

NEWCASTLE & GATESHEAD TUC CENTRE AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT

A report will be presented to the meeting.

APPENDIX: Motions to outside bodies

Motion submitted by Newcastle TUC to the TUC Northern Regional Annual Conference, and to Tyne & Wear CATUC for submission to the Trades Union Councils Annual Conference:

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OF ENERGY

Conference calls on trades councils to build a broad-based campaign, engaging local communities, for public ownership of our energy system.

The two increases in household fuel bills last year pushed half a million more households into fuel poverty. The increases this year, leaving aside any due to the Ukraine crisis, are likely to a total of 6 million households in fuel poverty. Mental health will also be impacted by rising household bills, adding to the pressures faced by overstretched and underfunded mental health services already under pressure due to the effects of Covid.

Yet the 'big five' energy retailers are making big profits. British Gas more than doubled its profit in the first six months of 2021, helping parent company Centrica to offset the losses when 7,000 engineers took industrial action to defeat the company's 'fire and rehire' plans.

If our energy system were brought into public ownership, the companies would not be duty bound to prioritise huge returns for shareholders. They could invest in the energy system, invest in renewables and use the financially buoyant times to build up reserves to protect against the types of price fluctuations we are seeing. In Britain, recent research at the University of Greenwich showed that eliminating private energy ownership would be equivalent to a staggering 25 per cent reduction in energy prices.

Conference calls for an immediate and tighter cap on gas and electricity charges, a windfall tax on energy sector monopoly profits and the permanent abolition of VAT on household fuel. Ultimately we recognise that only public ownership of energy will end the profiteering that is driving up energy bills and holding back development of sustainable energy production in Britain.

Emergency motion submitted by Newcastle TUC to TUC Northern Regional Annual Conference:

P&O SACKINGS

Conference is appalled at the self-confessed, unlawful action of the P&O management in dismissing circa 800 of their employees without going through the lawful requirements of UK law.

We are further appalled that the people employed to replace these 800 staff are to be paid well below the UK Minimum wage.

We salute the statements by dockers in Hull and in France that they will boycott P&O ships.

Conference calls for all the sacked staff to be re-employed with immediate effect and for P&O management to begin negotiations with the recognised trade unions as a matter of urgency.

Conference further calls for a new Bill of Workers Rights to include;

1. End fire and rehire style practices and stop companies firing at will.
2. Increase penalties on companies that break employment law.
3. Ban other forms of exploitative practices.

