

ANNUAL REPORT on 2024



IN MEMORIAM JIM SIMPKIN (24.12.1955-13.09.2024)



Our late secretary, Jim Simpkin, was born in Liverpool, went to secondary school in Cornwall when his family moved there, and took his degree in Teesside. He secured employment as a computer specialist at Parsons in Newcastle, where he joined the AUEW(TASS) branch – later MSF, Amicus and now the Unite TEEES branch. He became a section representative and a member of the negotiating committee, and is described by branch secretary Bob Murdoch as “always there” and “an excellent trade unionist in the workplace”.

In the later 1990s, after Parsons was taken over by Siemens, Jim was made redundant, a victim of the active purge against union representatives. At around this time he became more active in Newcastle Trades Council, though he was still union branch vice-chair and involved in authorising payments from the bank account. For a period he worked for British Airways, and then became a volunteer for several years at the Newcastle & Gateshead TUC Centre Against Unemployment, associated with the Trades Council. He was a skilled advice worker, taking on a number of individual cases regarding benefits.

Jim took over as Trades Council secretary in June 2003 when the previous secretary resigned. Over the 14 years from 1990 to 2023, there had been 9 different secretaries elected, and in fact at times the Trades Council was without one. By contrast, Jim held the role for just over 21 years – a really solid commitment. Not long after taking over, he led a discussion on ‘Monitoring and surveillance at work’. He was well ahead of his time on that.

Jim was also a delegate to:

- the Centre Against Unemployment Management Committee from 2000, and secretary of it by 2006 at the latest.
- the Tyne & Wear May Day Committee from 2005, and a long-time secretary of it.
- the Tyne & Wear County Association of Trades Union Councils from 2005, becoming vice-chair from 2016, if not earlier, and president from May 2022.
- The Northern Region TUC Council and Annual Conference for many years to the present.
- The Annual Conference of Trades Union Councils from 2005. His reports on the Conference were always very extensive.

For most of the time, while Jim was secretary, the Executive was composed only of himself, Alan Lubbock as treasurer and Martin Levy as president. This put a lot of work on the three officers, including the occasions when they:

- decorated the new ceiling on the first floor of the building the Trades Council owned at 4 Cloth Market;
- cleaned off the aspergillus mould in the stair well, and painted it; and
- put the building up for sale.

There were also some difficult moments – in particular, over spurious legal proceedings brought against the Trades Council by one ex-delegate, which went to the County Court.

Jim rarely missed a meeting in his whole time as secretary, and assiduously produced agendas and minutes for the Full Council and Executive each month, as well as his Secretary's Report and Annual Conference Report for the Trades Council's Annual Report. When he became secretary, there was a regular postal mailing of about 45 delegates, branch secretaries and other interested parties. He often did not get round to claiming his printing and postage expenses, even when – starting with the Covid pandemic – only the Annual Report was mailed out.

It was while Jim was secretary that the Trades Council adopted its own stylised stationery and established its own web site and associated e-mail accounts. Jim was fully involved in discussions around these, and produced some of the materials for the web site.

Jim could be relied on to turn up for events like rallies, street stalls and picket-lines, although latterly he complained that his knees prevented him from walking far. He was a regular photographer until recently at the Tyne & Wear May Day Rally, and could be relied upon to guard the equipment at the Rally site before the march arrived, and to help with clean-up afterwards.

The Covid pandemic put an end to face-to-face Trades Council meetings for a period, and when it abated we found that the venues we had used before were no longer available. So for a few years we met up bimonthly on Zoom, but over the past year we had shifted to hybrid in-person/Zoom meetings for the Full Council, and Jim was always there in person, until the last occasion, when he put in his apologies, on 4 September. And that was the last we heard from him.

Jim was a dedicated trade unionist, and was well-known by delegates to Trades Councils Annual Conferences. He had a strong sense of fairness at work and in the community, and knew that workers needed collective organisation and solidarity if they were to defend and extend their interests. He would often bring to our attention issues about which he felt passionately, and argue his case strongly.

For us, Jim was a comrade, but also a thoroughly decent chap with a likeable disposition. At a personal and organisational level, he will be sorely missed. Newcastle Trades Council owes him an enormous debt of gratitude for all that he did. He kept records of everything; and we now have a vast quantity of printed and electronic records from his flat, which will take much time to sort and archive.

In memory of Jim, the Trades Council has submitted a proposal to the Regional TUC Executive for the institution of an annual award for “innovative use of information technology in trades union campaigning activities, education and recruitment and retention of members.” The application goes on to say that:

“The trade union movement needs to find new ways of reaching out to the many millions of unorganised workers, and is facing a demographic cliff-edge, with less than 1 in 20 union members being aged between 16 and 24, and over half of union reps being aged 50 and over. It is a fact that young people rely increasingly on mobile phones for entertainment and information, in particular from 30-second reels on such platforms as TikTok. Far-right organisations have latched onto this, and their influence needs to be countered, quite apart from making the case for trades union membership.

“The shift to partial home working has already made difficulties for building trades unions in the workplace, and ways need to be found to overcome that. In the not-so-distant future, workers and their unions will also face many challenges with the increasing application of artificial intelligence. Unions need to find ways of embracing this new technology for their own purposes, in order to meet those challenges.”

Farewell, Jim. Rest in power!

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE TRADES UNION COUNCIL

Founded 18 January 1873

152nd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

7.00 pm WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2025

In person at the Tyneside Irish Centre and by Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82907117567?pwd=bkFMdjd4bTF0OXF3Vk94dWdhaTVnUT09>

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Election of Tellers (2)
3. Minutes of the 151stAGM, 2024
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

<ol style="list-style-type: none">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) 5.10 Trades Councils Joint Consultative Cttee (1)5.11 Tyne & Wear May Day Committee5.12 TUC Annual Women's Conference5.13 Annual Conference of Trades Union Councils5.14 Regional TUC delegate nominations	Nominations Received: M Levy (UCU) P Ford (USDAW) A Lubbock (Unite) (none) (none) R Brown (NEU) (none) M Levy, R Brown, A Lubbock, P Hill (UCU) M Levy, P Griffin (UCU), K Maddison (PCS) M Levy (none) (none) (none) A Foggett, R Brown, A Lubbock
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Nominations for 5.7-5.13 may be received at the AGM.

6. Invited Speaker (to be taken no later than 7.45 pm):

HEATHER BLAKEY
Unite Regional Women's and Equalities Officer

on

TACKLING THE FAR RIGHT

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE TRADES UNION COUNCIL

Minutes of 151st AGM

Wednesday 7 February 2024

1. Introduction and Attendance

The president, Martin Levy, welcomed delegates to the 151st Annual General Meeting of Newcastle upon Tyne Trades Union Council. The number of delegates present was again in double figures. This was the fourth AGM to be held online using Zoom.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Paul Ford and Bob Murdoch.

3. Tellers

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

4. Minutes of the 2023 AGM

Other than a small typo, the minutes were agreed as a correct record.

5. Annual Report:

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

President's Address

The president additionally talked about the current conflicts, adding to a more dangerous year. He reported on the Trades Council's 150th anniversary event held on 1 March 2023. Industrial action has increased and the support from the Trades Council has been an almost weekly event. We have also seen an increase in more anti-trade union laws, currently on minimum service levels and more frequent balloting rules. Other issues included education, Gaza-Israel and Labour Party politics.

Comments from delegates included trade union recruitment of women and young people, as well as the gig economy, represented by organisations like Amazon and Uber. Local days of action were also reported in education and the workplace.

The president's address was accepted.

Secretary's Report

The secretary highlighted that the current industrial action was not always about pay and conditions but included issues like bullying and outsourcing. The report was accepted.

Treasurer's Report

The treasurer explained the details in the accounts. More work was required to increase affiliations which appear to be down from the peak in 2022. He also explained some of the other details including PPPS, Zoom costs, Stop the War Coalition, Bread & Roses poetry book, Stand Up To Racism (uncashed cheque), lightweight banner and treasurer's laptop and software.

Auditors' Report

The treasurer had provided the auditors with the detailed accounts electronically. The auditors accepted the financial report as a true and correct representation of the accounts. The auditors thanked the treasurer for his diligent work.

The meeting accepted the auditors' report and the treasurer's report.

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

The report was briefly discussed, including the forthcoming last Northern Regional TUC conference, prior the planned merger in 2025. Rebuilding of trades councils in North Tyneside and Durham is under way, following setbacks during Covid-19. The meeting accepted the report.

Trades Union Councils Annual Conference

The 2023 Trades Councils Conference was held at Congress House, London. The number of delegates was down on pre-Covid levels. All the motions will be used by the TUCJCC to develop the work programme. The meeting accepted the report.

Tyne & Wear May Day Committee, People's Press Printing Society, Newcastle Unites, Stop the War Coalition and International Brigade Memorial Trust

The printed reports were accepted by the meeting.

North East People's Assembly Against Austerity

Campaigning at Hassockfield (formerly Medomsley Detention Centre, now Derwentside IRC) was referenced. 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 was paused due to Covid-19 but we hope to return soon, possibly online. We also need to review the relationship with the MEM/People's Advice Service. The oral report was accepted by the meeting

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 Paul Griffin (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 nomination: Martin Levy.

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

Annual Conference of Trades Union Councils delegate: Jim Simpkin.

TUC Women's Conference: vacant.

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

7. Amendments to Rules: none submitted.

REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 5 FEBRUARY 2025

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2. Acting Secretary's Report
3. Annual Conference of Trades Union Councils
4. Tyne & Wear County Association of Trades Union Councils
5. Trades Union Councils Joint Consultative Committee (TUCJCC)
6. Northern Regional Trades Union Congress
7. Tyne & Wear May Day Committee
8. People's Press Printing Society (PPPS)
9. People's Assembly Against Austerity
10. Palestine Solidarity/Stop the War/CND
11. Newcastle Unites/Stand Up to Racism
12. International Brigade Memorial Trust
13. Electronic Media

Appendix: Resolution to TUC Regional Conference

Other AGM Reports will be presented to the meeting.

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

The major political issue over the past year has of course been Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza, and the extension to Lebanon. The daily destruction of property and lives has been horrific, and both the present and the last British governments have been complicit in the genocide, due to the continued supply of weapons, components and intelligence data to Israel. Newcastle TUC has rightly added its voice to the many protests. We can be relieved that ceasefires have been declared, prisoners of both sides are being released, and Israel is withdrawing its forces from Gaza and Lebanon. However, Israel has meanwhile expanded its invasion into Syria, and we can’t be certain that it won’t launch further attacks on Gaza.

With the fighting over, at least for now, Western governments and mass media organisations would like to sweep the genocide under the carpet. This must not be allowed to happen. Israeli prime minister Netanyahu is still a wanted man by the International Criminal Court, and needs to be brought to justice. Unfortunately there are many others, in Israel and the West, who are equally culpable. Israel must be forced to withdraw from all Palestinian territories and accept the establishment of a Palestinian state.

It is not only over Palestine that the change of government at Westminster has made little difference on foreign policy. If anything, Starmer is more gung-ho than Sunak over the war in Ukraine. In the recently-agreed 100-year partnership deal, Starmer has pledged £100 bn annually in military aid to Ukraine “for as long as it takes”, and £40m for an economic recovery programme. Is this in response to Donald Trump’s promise to end the war, and his demand that European NATO partners carry more of the burden for their own ‘security’? As long as this NATO proxy war continues, more Ukrainian lives will be lost. It is high time for Western leaders to recognise their folly, and to tell Ukraine to sue for peace.

“War,” as von Clausewitz said, “is not merely a political act but a real political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, a carrying out of the same by other means.” It is a means of achieving political ends by military force. We can condemn Russia for launching the war and for seizing Ukrainian territory; but the planned eastward advance of the NATO frontier to encompass Ukraine was not there for altruistic reasons, but rather to surround and dominate Russia, in order to weaken it politically and economically – even, as some Western politicians have suggested, to break it up. And whose interests would that serve? Not the peoples of Russia, Ukraine or the West, but the big Western arms manufacturers, and the other big Western monopolies seeking to make superprofits out of Russia’s collapse.

International politics cannot be separated from domestic politics. The same British governments that have quietly supported Israel’s aggression, and actively promoted the proxy war on Ukraine, have been promoting the interests of the big monopolies at home too. There is not a lot of difference to show between Starmer and Sunak on domestic issues. The new Labour government says that it can’t spend because of the state of the country’s finances. But then it can find the money for the military and the Ukraine war, and it is not prepared to tax the super-rich and the big corporations. Austerity Mark 2 is coming, and trade unions need to resist it. Schools, hospitals, local authorities, fire and rescue, universities and the civil service will all suffer unless there is a fightback.

True, there have been a few gains under Labour: the junior doctors’ and ASLEF pay disputes have been settled, rail passenger transport is being slowly nationalised and the Employment Rights Bill has been introduced into Parliament. However, these are not much: the Bill itself falls well short of Labour’s original *A New Deal for Workers* and notably still leaves all pre-2016 anti-union legislation in place. There needs to be pressure on MPs to strengthen the legislation in unions’ interests.

Employers still have the whip-hand, as shown by the disgraceful sacking of the three PCS branch officers at HMRC Benton Park View. It is crucial that solidarity is extended to our colleagues. If the HMRC management can get away the sackings, then no workplace trade union representative in this city is safe. Support the strike fund, and do what you can to mobilise for the big rally on Friday February 14.

Labour’s sweeping victory in the July general election was achieved despite its vote total being less than in 2019. Overall turnout was well down, the Tory vote collapsed and Reform UK took a significant share – around 25% in several working-class constituencies in the North East. And here lies the danger if Labour in government does not make a real difference for workers: just as in Germany, France, Italy and the USA, disillusionment with

centrist policies risks the advance of the far-right. Already opinion polls show Labour slipping badly and Reform UK doing well, in fact better than Labour in one poll.

The fascist riots that broke out in August reflect the breakdown of support for the mainstream parties. When people feel marginalised, they become easy prey to racist and fascist rhetoric, and the sort of sensationalist claims that have been fostered by Tory politicians and in the right-wing mass media. What Reform's election result did was to make such claims respectable. The resistance to the planned racist outrages in Newcastle was magnificent, as have been the anti-Tommy Robinson marches in London. But the labour movement needs to go further: (1) exposing the far-right, showing people that racist policies lead to barbarism, and that Reform UK is an anti-working class party; and (2) giving people hope and confidence that, by combining together around a programme of alternative policies, things can really get better.

To stem the rise of fascism and right-wing demagoguery, we also need to defend our existing democratic rights, including the right to protest. The Metropolitan Police's refusal to let Palestine demonstrators march to the BBC on 18 January, and the arrests of, and charges against, the organisers Chris Nineham and Ben Jamal, and about 70 other demonstrators, suggests a government-inspired attempt to crack down on any protests seriously challenging the political status quo. We must demand that the charges are dropped and the right to march peacefully is upheld.

With Trump back in the White House, the world faces an uncertain future. Already he is seeking to incorporate Canada and Greenland in the United States, and to take back control over the Panama Canal, while he has disgracefully restored socialist Cuba to the 'state sponsors of terrorism' list. Although he supported the ceasefire in Gaza, his motives are perhaps revealed by his statement that Jordan and Egypt should take up to one and a half million Gazans – it's genocide by another name. If he really does want to end the war in Ukraine, it's because he wants to focus on building up to potential war with China.

These are not the ravings of a madman, but a reflection of the fact that the world is changing and US imperialism can no longer dictate. China is outstripping the US, not only in manufacturing but in information technology (most recently with DeepSeek), and the Global South is no longer prepared to be dictated to by the West. The fight for peace will be a major priority and within that we have to continue to make the case for arms conversion.

ACTING SECRETARY'S REPORT: Paul Ford (USDAW F176 BRANCH)

By rights, this report should have been in Jim Simpkin's name. The minutes that he recorded, up until his untimely death, have provided the basis for the report.

The Full Council has, as usual, met monthly except for a break in August. Initially, those meetings were at 7 pm by Zoom, following the poor take up in 2023 for in-person attendance at 6 pm at the Unite building. However, from April, it was agreed to change to hybrid meetings at 7 pm, using the Tyneside Irish Centre for in-person attendance. As a one-off, a similar hybrid meeting had been held in March, but at 6 pm, in order to allow interested delegates to attend the Townsend Productions Play, *Behold Ye Ramblers*, at the same venue at 7.30 pm.

Attendance numbers at Full Council meetings were not recorded until April, but thenceforward, the average (including invited speakers) was 9.25, with an average of 2 apologies.

The Executive has continued to meet monthly, by Zoom. The August meeting, delayed from the 21st to the 28th because both Jim Simpkin and Martin Levy were indisposed, was the last meeting that Jim attended, and minutes for it were never found. He may even have passed away during the following night. The cause of death turned out to be a severe bronchial ailment.

Highlights of Full Council meetings during the year were:

- Mick Bowman in June, reporting on his Walk to Palestine and his experiences on the West Bank;
- In September, a report from Rachel Farmer and Joel Hamilton from PCS at HMRC Benton Park View, and Simon Elliott, PCS regional secretary, on the sacking of branch

reps Rachel, Joel, and Gordon Askew, and the planned actions by the union to defend them.

- In November, a discussion on the Employment Rights Bill, introduced by the president, and a report from UCU Newcastle University delegate Graham Kirkwood over the massive financial cutbacks planned at his institution. A suggestion of a public meeting in connection with the Employment Rights Bill has now been taken up by Tyne & Wear CATUC.
- In January 2025, an update on PCS Benton Park View's dispute from branch treasurer David Mason, and a presentation from Newcastle University PhD student Vyshack Thaliyil, in connection with his appeal for trade union financial support for his video project, 'United We Stand'.

Throughout the year the Trades Council publicised demonstrations in support of Palestine. In May a donation of £100 was given to the student encampment at Newcastle University; and on November 28 the president spoke at a rally near St Thomas's Church, in connection with the Workplace Day of Action (see back cover photo).

The Trades Council has also given regular publicity to the PCS Benton Park View dispute, taking banners to one of the initial rallies and to the first picket-line on 23 December (photo on front cover), and encouraging affiliates to do likewise and to donate to the strike fund; the Trades Council itself donated £200 in January 2025. However, a letter in September to the city's three MPs, seeking government intervention, received only one reply, from Catherine McKinnell, and even that was less than satisfactory.



Publicity and picket-line support has also been given to (see photos on front cover):

- NEU and NASUWT members striking to defend their contractual terms and conditions at Dame Allan's School in Fenham;
- ASLEF members striking against the train operating companies; and
- GMB security staff employed by G4S at the JobCentre on Cathedral Square.

During the course of the year, the Trades Council affiliated, or reaffiliated, to: Tyne & Wear CATUC; Marras (organisers of the Durham Miners' Gala), Stop the War, CND, Venezuela Solidarity Campaign. It gave additional donations as follows:

- £200 to Stand Up To Racism North East for the coach to the Glasgow demonstration in connection with the UN International Day Against Racism;
- £250 to Culture Matters (www.culturematters.org.uk) as sponsorship for the 2024 Bread & Roses Poetry Award;
- £100 to Platform Films to help sponsor *The Big Lie 2*;
- £100 to the National Pensioners' Convention (Northern Region) for their new web site;
- £50 to the Stop the war Coalition Winter Appeal;
- £50 to the Follonsby Wardley Lodge Banner group;
- £120 to Stand Up To Racism North East to help fund tickets to the national anti-racist demonstration in October, and a further £100 in January 2025 for the coach to London for the 'Oppose Tommy Robinson Supporters – Stop the Far Right' demonstration on 1 February.

Among other matters, the Trades Council:

- paraded its banner at the 2024 May Day March and Rally;
- wrote in October to the City Council regarding the dangerous traffic situation outside Wingrove School, which had led to an accident – and in fact received a satisfactory reply;

- attended, through the president and treasurer, the Unite Regional Trades Council Event on 3 December, which provided useful discussion and contacts;
- circulated, for the first time, a digital Christmas card;
- collected massive quantities of trades council paper files and digital records from Jim Simpkin's flat, delivering them to the office at the Wallsend MEM; and
- provided a speaker (the president) for the 'Dump Trump, Stop the Far Right' rally at Grey's Monument on Monday 20 January 2025.

It is fair to say that there has been a bit of a slippage in affiliations in 2024, which the Executive only began lately to address. As before, we still need many more women and black delegates.

TREASURER'S REPORT ON 2024: Alan Lubbock (Unite TEEES)

A report will be presented to the meeting.

AUDITORS' REPORT: Bob Murdoch and Peter Rutherford (both Unite TEEES)

An oral report will be presented to the meeting.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF TRADES UNION COUNCILS 2024: Martin Levy (in lieu of Jim Simpkin)

The conference was held at Congress House on 1/2 June. Attendance was very poor compared with previous years – only 40 delegates registered. It was chaired, idiosyncratically, by TUC general council member Simon Weller of ASLEF. The business consisted of the following:

- TUCJCC Annual Report – accepted.
- Motions (all agreed with amendments, except where stated otherwise):
 1. Trade union legislation (Colchester & District TC).
 2. Call for a public enquiry into the blacklisting scandal (Keighley TUC).
 3. Trade union solidarity with Palestine (Rochdale MB TC), with amendments from Lincoln TC and Tyne & Wear CATUC. The latter, calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state, was opposed by the mover but nonetheless carried.
 4. Peace and New Lucas Plan (Tyne & Wear CATUC).
 5. Gaza (South Yorkshire CATUC), with an amendment from Lincoln TC on BDS. The amendment from Keighley TC, which sought to delete applause for Labour councillors and members over the party's support for Israel, was lost.
 6. Hazards Magazine financial appeal (West Yorkshire CATUC).
 7. Trades councils supporting trades councils (Bristol TC).
 8. Trades councils conference venue (NE Lancs TC), with amendment from Stroud TC on making venues accessible. This motion was selected to go forward to the TUC Annual Conference.
 9. (no motion existed)
 10. Invest in post-hospital discharge care (North Norfolk TUC).
 11. Smash the anti-union laws – demand the right to strike (Camden TC) with amendments from Coventry TUC.
 12. Budget cuts at Nottingham City Council (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham and Mansfield TC), with amendments from Coventry TUC.
 13. NHS dental services (Lancashire CATUC).
 14. Fighting council cuts and 'bankruptcy' (Waltham Forest TC) with amendments from Islington TC.
 15. The unacceptable use of technology (Blackpool, Fylde & Wyre TUC).
- Revised Model Rules for Trades Union Councils: agreed, with uncontentious amendments from Cheltenham & District TC and Yeovil & District TC. A proposed amendment from Hampshire CA and Portsmouth TUC, which would have allowed a secretary to remain in place indefinitely, without annual election, fell as there was no delegate to move it. The Tyne & Wear CATUC amendment was withdrawn as it was badly composed.

- Proposed Model Rules for Associations of Trades Union Councils: agreed, with an uncontentious amendment from Tyne & Wear CATUC. An amendment from Hampshire CA and Portsmouth TUC, which would have allowed a secretary to remain in place indefinitely, without annual election, again fell as there was no delegate to move it.
- Trades Councils Conference Standing Orders and Rules for the Election of the TUCJCC: agreed, with an amendment from Newcastle TUC, specifying the constituencies for TUCJCC members.
- Saturday lunchtime: women delegates' meeting.
- Saturday afternoon: workshop on problems and challenges facing trades councils, which included useful ideas from Leeds TUC.
- Saturday evening: talk by John Dunn of the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign, followed by a showing of Yvette Vanson's film, *the Battle for Orgreave*.
- Sunday morning: keynote address from TUC general secretary Paul Nowak (PN), followed by Q&A session. In response to a request from a delegate for non-gendered forms of address, PN suggested the use of "Comrades" rather than "Brothers and Sisters".

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

The CATUC has continued to meet by Zoom, but from the AGM in May the frequency of meetings returned to the monthly pattern of before the pandemic. With the re-establishment of North Tyneside TUC, and the reinvigoration of South Tyneside TUC, all trades councils in Tyne & Wear have been represented.

All meetings (apart from the AGM) have featured an opening political discussion, followed by minutes and reports, typically from individual trades councils, the Regional TUC, the People's Assembly, Palestine Solidarity/Stop the War, Stand Up To Racism, the North East Passenger Transport Users' Group, and the Trades Union Councils Joint Consultative Committee.

Items discussed included: Israel's war on Gaza; Jamie Driscoll and the Labour Party; Julian Assange; sleaze in the body politic under the Tories; the general election choices and outcome; the danger of the far right; the lack of change under Labour; the GMB's campaign at Amazon Coventry (how to organise workers in areas of low density); the Unite regional meeting for trades councils; and artificial intelligence.

The CATUC submitted a motion on Palestine to the 2024 Regional TUC conference; and, for the Trades Councils Annual Conference, it submitted a motion on 'Peace and the New Lucas Plan', and amendments to the new model rules for trades councils and associations. These were all successful, apart from one amendment which was withdrawn. A motion on the Employment Rights Bill is being submitted to the 2025 Regional TUC conference.

Martin Levy and Dawn Wainwright represented the CATUC at the Trades Councils Conference, and the CATUC much appreciates the financial support enabling Dawn's attendance. Martin Levy's expenses were covered by the TUC, in his capacity of TUCJCC representative.

Following the adoption of the new model rules for associations at the Trades Councils Conference, and their endorsement by the TUC general council, the CATUC explored the possibility of expanding its remit to cover the whole North East Combined Authority area, but neither Berwick & District Trades Council, nor Durham & Districts Trades Council, were interested.

At the AGM in May, Jim Simpkin was elected president, Martin Levy secretary, Dawn Wainwright (Sunderland) vice-president and Alan Lubbock treasurer. At the October meeting, Martin Levy read a tribute to Jim, following which other delegates paid tributes. Dawn Wainwright then gave a report of the annual TUC conference, and following that took over as acting president until the 2025 AGM.

A public meeting on the Employment Rights Bill is currently being planned.

TRADES UNION COUNCILS JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (TUCJCC): Martin Levy (Northern/North East regional representative)

Much of the work of the TUCJCC has concerned preparations for the annual conference, and then implementation of the decisions, although in addition reports have regularly been given on local activity by the various regional representatives.

In February 2024 the Committee finalised the draft new rules and standing orders for trades councils, associations and the Conference, and arrangements for submitting amendments. In May the conference final agenda, including speakers and workshops, was agreed. There was a meeting on the eve of conference, which ruled an emergency motion out of order.

The July meeting considered the Conference feedback. A discussion took place on the financial implications of holding the Conference in London, particularly in relation to accommodation costs. The motion to Congress chosen by the Conference called for the Conference to be held outside London.

It was agreed that:

- regular reminders should be sent to Trades Councils regarding deadlines for delegate registration, motions and amendments etc.
- the office should send out a questionnaire asking trades councils who didn't attend the Conference the reasons why. The survey would also ask about the submission of motions.
- the purpose and the format of the Women's Reception at conference should be reviewed.

At the same meeting a request was made for a trades councils' stall at TUC Congress, with Jane Aitchison (Yorkshire & Humberside) and Dave Chapple (West of England) offering to produce a pamphlet for it. It was also reported that 100 people representing 70 trades councils are in the Trades Councils WhatsApp group.

The pamphlet was actually produced, but the stall was not forthcoming and the pamphlet ended up being displayed on the Unemployed Workers' Combine stall.

The October meeting discussed the content of the Work Programme, which is supposed to include the Conference decisions and any TUC priorities. It should have been sent out thereafter, but that still has not happened, 7 months after the Conference. The meeting also agreed a much simplified procedure for trades council re-registration for 2025, and the questions for the Conference evaluation survey.

Although Congress in September had passed the motion on the location of the Trades Councils Conference, the TUC office suggested that that would be difficult to achieve for 2025, and requested one last time at Congress House in London. That was agreed on the basis of starting later on the Saturday, and finishing later on the Sunday, so that only one night's hotel accommodation would be needed.

I was unable to attend the December meeting, as the date was changed, but the survey results showed 51 responses (29%), of whom 33 did not attend the 2024 Conference. The main reasons given for not attending were: cost of hotel and/or travel – 10; and not having anyone who could attend – 13. The same meeting discussed the state of re-registrations and the need for a reminder in January, with JCC reps being given a list to chase.

The meeting agreed that Conference 2025 would start at 1.30 pm on the Saturday and finish at 3 pm on the Sunday. The was originally agreed to be 6/7 June, but that has recently been thrown into question.

NORTHERN REGIONAL TRADES UNION CONGRESS: Martin Levy

The shadow of merger between the North East and the Yorkshire & Humberside Region has been a constant background to the work of the Northern Region TUC throughout the year. Liz Blackshaw, joint regional secretary, presented a draft constitution in February, but it was far from satisfactory. A joint working group (in which I participated) was set up, and met a few times; a projected joint Awayday for the two Executives was delayed, and then replaced by a working group Awayday, which I was unable to attend as it clashed with my holiday. A revised draft constitution was circulated in August for consultation, to which Newcastle TUC responded in detail about the trades council representation. The draft was discussed by the

two Executives in September, with a number of issues being raised. Liz agreed to take these issues away, and a 'final' draft of the constitution was put to a joint Executives meeting on 23 October. However, there were still issues to resolve around trades council representation, so Liz set up a meeting with TUCJCC members Jane Aitchison (Y&H) and myself (Northern) on 28 October, shortly before she left the post of regional secretary. The end-result is not entirely satisfactory, but it is the better than we started with, and the best we can get from a merger that trades councils throughout the combined region did not want.

Since Liz left, her role has been covered by the North West regional secretary Jay McKenna. Interviews for a permanent replacement took place in November, but the new appointment has yet to be confirmed.

Regional Executive meetings have continued to provide useful information about ongoing industrial disputes – and about other matters, such as the cancelling of trade union education at Newcastle College, due to the disappearance of funding from the new Combined Authority. For the same reason, TUC staff involved with trade union learning are being made redundant.

The very last Northern Region Annual Conference was held at the Crowne Plaza hotel in Newcastle on Saturday 23 March. 122 delegates were registered, but fewer than half the 32 registered trades council delegates attended. Among the guest speakers were: Heather Wood from National Women Against Pit Closures; Kevin Rowan, TUC head of Organising and Services; and Fran Heathcote, newly elected general secretary of PCS. 24 motions were debated, including two on Palestine (from North Tyneside TUC and Tyne & Wear CATUC), Newcastle TUC's motion on Lockheed Martin (see Appendix) and two separate motions on Minimum Service Levels. All motions were passed, but Newcastle TUC's motion had the longest debate, with Unite in particular being opposed because they have negotiation rights at that company.

TYNE & WEAR MAY DAY COMMITTEE: Ron Brown (NEU), Martin Levy, Peter Hill and on behalf of the late Jim Simpkin



The 2024 Tyne and Wear May Day March and Rally was held in Newcastle City Centre on Saturday 4 May. As in recent years, the march assembled in Exhibition Park and finished at Grey's Monument, where the rally took place. Speakers included Liz Blackshaw (Regional TUC secretary), Sarah Wooley (general secretary, Bakers' Union), Mick Bowman (Mick's Walk to Palestine'), Mohaned Elnour (Sudanese Communist Party) and Martin Dent (Unite4Energy for All Campaign), as well as a range of local speakers.

The rally was followed by a social at Tyneside Irish Centre with music from local band St Buryan and free traditional Palestinian food provided by the local Palestinian community. May Day brochure sales and voluntary contributions for food raised £500 for the Palestinian

Centre of Youth Action for Community (Laylac). Food left over from the social was taken straight to the student Palestine solidarity encampment at Newcastle University.

The May Day committee met in 2024 to reflect on the event and plan ahead for 2025. It was agreed that the speakers' contributions were excellent and well-received, that the social was a success, including the funds raised for Laylac. Turnout reflected an overall decline in numbers over the last few years: this could have been, in part, due to activists' fatigue at having being involved in intensive industrial and Palestine solidarity action over many months. The committee agreed that improving the turnout should take priority. In order to increase engagement the committee is appealing for more representation of trade union branches on the committee and plans to make better use of social media.

Tyne and Wear May Day 2025 will take place on Saturday 3 May. A number of high-profile speakers have already been confirmed.

PEOPLE'S PRESS PRINTING SOCIETY (PPPS): Ron Brown

The main role of the PPPS is the daily publication of the *Morning Star* as a vehicle for broad left reporting and policies. Alone among the national daily papers, the *Morning Star* has continued to expose Israel's genocide in Gaza and the British government's complicity in it.

On 30 May 2024, in the run-up to the Trades Councils Annual Conference, the *Morning Star* carried an article on 'Why Trades Councils Matter', by Mary Adossides, president of the Greater London Association of Trade Union Councils, Here is a link:

<https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/why-trades-councils-matter>

Free copies of the *Morning Star* were available to anyone attending picket lines or Palestine solidarity demonstrations throughout 2024. Local readers and supporters were on the ground to distribute these on numerous occasions.

As usual, the major distribution event regionally was the Durham Miners' Gala on Saturday 13 July. In pouring rain, readers and supporters did their best to distribute 3000 copies, though there were some left over. More hands on deck next year would help get the job done. Free copies were also made available 'en masse' at Tyne and Wear May Day on Saturday 4 May. Newcastle Trades Council placed adverts in the paper for both these events, as well as in the New Year edition and for the TUC and Labour Party conferences.



The North East *Morning Star* Readers' and Supporters' Group organised the following fundraising and political events in 2024: Tyneside Burns Supper (21 January, Tyneside Irish Centre); public meeting '100 years of Labour Governments: where now for the working class?' (18 April, Tyneside Irish Centre); and a summer barbecue (31 August, 15 Casterton Grove, North Walbottle). Newcastle TUC helped promote these events online. An organising meeting to expand the Readers' and Supporters' Group and its activities was held at the Wallsend MEM on 28 May, though its plans were overtaken by the general election, and little progress has been made since.

Nationally, the *Morning Star* held its first public conference in years – 'For a Workers' Fightback' – on Saturday 11 March in London. The event was a success that the paper aims

to build on in this and future years. On Saturday 14 June 2025, there will be a conference at Bloomsbury Baptist Church in London, on the theme of 'Race, Sex and Class Liberation'. These conferences are an opportunity to channel the voices of the broad left since the defeat of Corbynism and the subsequent rightward march of the Labour Party.

The PPPS held its 2024 AGM in 4 legs, 6-9 June, in London, Glasgow, Barnsley and Wales. The 2025 AGM will be held in similar fashion (with the Northern venue still tbc), 29 May-1 June. Anyone who has shares in the PPPS is encouraged to attend.

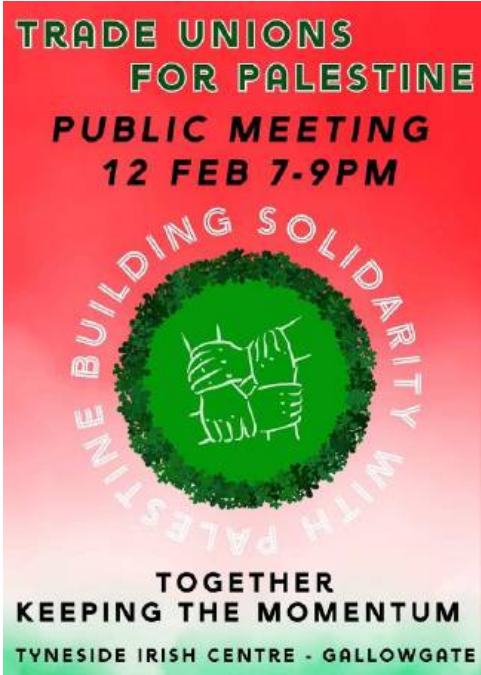
The paper's costs have gone up hugely through the inflationary crisis of the last few years. In response cover prices have been raised and, so far, this does not appear to have reduced sales, but it is unlikely to be enough to secure the paper's future on its own. Increasing the number of daily paper sales, online subscriptions and shareholders is a major priority.

An offer to trade union branches allows them to buy 10 online premium subscriptions for £500, which can then be issued freely to their members. This is a substantial saving when compared to the standard cost of an individual online premium subscription. NEU Newcastle District is in the process of discussing whether to go ahead with this offer and a decision is expected in January 2025.

NORTH EAST PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY AGAINST AUSTERITY:

The People's Assembly was fairly quiet in 2024, due to pressure of other activities – principally the general election, and protests against Israel's war on Palestine. However, a steering committee meeting was held on Zoom in January 2025. It was agreed that cuts/austerity looks very much on the agenda, given the continuation of the two-child benefit cap, the scrapping of the winter fuel allowance, further attacks on those claiming welfare/social security and the recent news of increased interest payments on government bonds. There are also numerous issues of concern around which there might be campaigns: housing, food security, the NHS, inflation/wages, job cuts, welfare cuts, etc, and the PA is looking to hold a public meeting in March, ahead of the spring budget.

PALESTINE SOLIDARITY/STOP THE WAR/CND:



Newcastle TUC is affiliated to both Stop the War and CND, who together with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, the Muslim Association of Britain and the Friends of Al-Aqsa, have organised the big national protests against Israel's genocide in Gaza. Locally, there have been many actions, coordinated and or publicised by Newcastle PSC – marches, the student

encampment at Newcastle University, pickets at the Rafael factory on Scotswood Road, a die-in at Central Station, and a sit-in at Barclays Bank, to name but a few.

In late 2024, there were two nationally-called Workplace days of Action for Palestine. On the first occasion, 10 October, there was a lunchtime rally at Northumbria University, supported by UCU and Unison. Thereafter a Trade Unions for Palestine WhatsApp group was set up, and the second Day of Action, on 28 November, included a lunchtime rally at St Thomas's Church in the Haymarket, with wider support, and speakers including this Trades Council's president (back cover photo). In 2025, Trade Unions for Palestine will be marking the next Workplace Day of Action with a public meeting at 7-9 pm on Wednesday 12 February at the Tyneside Irish Centre, and a rally at Grey's Monument at noon on Thursday 13 February (see above).

NEWCASTLE UNITES/STAND UP TO RACISM:

Newcastle Unites and Stand Up to Racism have again worked closely together, particularly in mobilising against the fascist threat, outside the Beacon Centre on 7 August, and in Newgate Street on Saturday 10 August. A public meeting, 'Stop the Far Right – Unite against Racism, Islamophobia and Antisemitism', was held at Brunswick Methodist Church on 3 September, with speakers including regional TUC secretary Liz Blackshaw, FBU regional secretary Brian Harris and NEU regional chair Alex Snowdon. In March, a coach was sent to the Glasgow demonstration in connection with the UN International Day against Racism, and on 26 October, there was organised train transport to the 'Stop Tommy Robinson – Stop the Far Right' demonstration in London. Newcastle Unites has continued to promote the monthly demonstrations against the Hassockfield detention centre for asylum seekers; and at the time of writing, a Stand Up To Racism coach is due to go to London for the 'Oppose Tommy Robinson Supporters – Stop the Far Right' demonstration on Saturday 1 February.

INTERNATIONAL BRIGADE MEMORIAL TRUST (IBMT): Ron Brown

The annual commemoration of the volunteers from the North East who gave their lives fighting fascism in Spain was held at the memorial plaque outside Newcastle Civic Centre on Sunday 20 October. The event was organised by Newcastle Trades Council and the North East Volunteers for Liberty, in coordination with the IBMT. Speeches were made by representatives of the Unite NEY&H Region, Newcastle Trades Council, North Tyneside Trades Council, the Communist Party of Britain and the Communist Party of Spain. (NB The Trades Council is a bit late in renewing its annual affiliation to the IBMT.)



ELECTRONIC MEDIA: Paul Ford

Much still remains to be added to the Trades Council's website;, in particular the tribute to Jim Simpkin needs to be added to the Roll of Honour.

There were two mass email circulations, using the MailChimp facility:

- 23 February 2024: junior doctors' strike 24-28 February and online event, 'Ukraine – How to stop this war'.
- 14 January 2025: 'Dump Trump' rally and 'Support PCS members on strike at HMRC Benton Park View'.

There were also many emails sent out, advertising local and national strikes, picket lines and rallies, and we have posted updates of local and national events on our Facebook page.

NEWCASTLE & GATESHEAD TUC CENTRE AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT

A report will be presented to the meeting.

APPENDIX: MOTION SUBMITTED TO REGIONAL TUC CONFERENCE, 2024

LOCKHEED MARTIN

Conference is alarmed to learn that Northumbria University, a major higher education provider in the region, has entered into a £15m partnership with Lockheed Martin to build a "world leading" space science centre at the University's city centre campus in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Lockheed Martin is well known as a supplier of military hardware, and is "proud of the significant role" it has played in supplying the Israeli Air Force – most recently with F-35 fighter jets which have been used by Israel in its genocidal attack on Gaza. Shortly after the Hamas attack on October 7, United States officials acted quickly to supply Israel with new F-35 weapons capabilities and spare parts.

Lockheed Martin stands to make big profits out of the conflict. The jets sell for over \$120m each, and in July 2023 Israel already had 50, with the intention of buying 25 more.

It is disingenuous of Northumbria University to claim that the Lockheed Martin partnership is ethically sound because the company's Space business segment is separate from Aeronautics. Quite apart from transferable technology between business segments, Lockheed Martin Space includes Military Space and Strategic and Missile Defense Systems.

At the very least, the partnership is a form of 'science-washing', making the company appear beneficent, and glossing over its role as a merchant of death. The partnership will also educate students to ignore any ethical responsibilities from the skills they gain. At its worst, the partnership represents public sector support for private-sector production of advanced military hardware, and the research and human capital required to sustain it.

Conference therefore calls on Northumbria University to cancel its partnership with Lockheed Martin.

