

Waltham Forest Trades Council

Annual Report 2023



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Linda Taaffe, my predecessor as WFTC secretary, commented in her report last year: “The logjam [is] well and truly busted wide open... The fightback has begun.” This year we can say that the struggle has continued, on national, regional, and local levels, and that it has brought important victories for workers, even if sometimes not everything unions have demanded. Just to list all the disputes underlines how much work the trades council, and its delegates, have done.

The first eight months of the year saw the continuation of many of the national strikes that began in 2022. Although the Royal Mail dispute concluded in the face of gross victimisation of reps and members, others continued for many months, while new battles commenced. Trades council delegates visited picket lines of BMA junior doctors at Whipps, PCS members in the DWP in Waltham Forest, a whole number of schools in the NEU pay strike, RMT and ASLEF members in the TOCs, while also giving support to UCU members in universities and colleges throughout London as part of national action on a number of issues.



The trades council organised solidarity and support to help win these disputes. As part of the mass action on 15 March, we organised an open meeting the night before, attended by PCS and RMT members, amongst others, then had a small gathering in Walthamstow Town Square as we gathered to go to the demo in central London. In

May, we raised hundreds of pounds for strike funds of unions in a social in Ye Olde Rose and Crown pub, with speakers from the disputes.

There have also been a number of local and regional strikes. London Underground RMT and ASLEF took action earlier in the year, and the RMT earlier in 2024 forced a big concession from TfL on pay with the threat of more strikes. Determined action can win, as ASLEF's calling of more strikes pushed back LNER management on the minimum service level provisions, which has big lessons for the entire labour movement.



Similarly, Unite in Barts Hospital Trust continue to battle for fair treatment on pay and other issues from NHS management, having been reintegrated into the NHS workforce in the spring. Pickets at Whipps Cross Hospital have been amongst the liveliest in the labour movement, and they have organised numerous rallies outside the hospitals in the trust, at which the trades council secretary and others spoke. We invited strikers from the Unite St Mungo's strike to speak at our meeting.

We have also attended local disputes in Waltham Forest including the Connaught School strike of NEU members, against the effects of academisation.

Workers' health and safety is always a priority for us, and it is mentioned elsewhere, but Workers' Memorial Day, the vigil for Ekarmanjeet Singh, supporting Glenroy Watson against London Underground and involvement in Action for Mesotheliom Day have all been important in our work.

We have been active in the trades council movement, sending Tommy Anderson and Kevin Parslow as delegates to GLATUC, and Tommy to the trades council conference. The Hoe Street Club hosted the GLATUC Christmas social in 2023.

The trades council has also been involved in social and political campaigns, supporting refugees and asylum seekers against racist laws and attacks. We continue to support the homeless with action led by Tommy Anderson at Christmas and throughout the year. The Save Our Square campaign, chaired by Nancy Taaffe, continued to raise issues of safety and affordability despite the blocks finally being constructed. Members including Mick Holder and Sam Mason participated in the 'XR the big one' event, and we now must step up the campaign for a just transition for workers on climate change.

Internationally, we have been active in the local and national protests against the onslaught on Gaza and the Palestinians. This is commented on in the report, but we have also pointed the way for workers solution to the war in Ukraine, and supported trade unionists in Turkey.

I am exhausted just collating all this and writing it up, so to have participated in all this was a tremendous effort! Collectively, we have begun to forge a serious force for the working class in the borough and wider. If 2023 was a busy year, 2024 and beyond will continue to raise challenges for the workers' movement. For us in the first six months of 2024, there are threatened cuts in the council, we have Heart Union week, Workers Memorial Day, May Day, and our Trade Union movement festival on 30 June, which we all have a responsibility to build. At some time during the year there will be a general election. We want to get rid of the Tories, but who with? Labour holds little attraction to trade unionists so we will keep our powder dry. We should commit to organising a debate for candidates at the general election, whenever it is called.

Comrades let's recommit and rejuvenate ourselves to building a trades council which continues to widen its influence amongst the movement in the borough and supports and gives a lead to workers everywhere.

Kevin Parslow

Trades Council Secretary 2023-24



President's Report

November and December were a busy month with donations and events, here are the photos below:

1. I organised a homeless outreach at Mission Grove on the last Saturday in November, where we handed out food and gifts with Christian Kitchen. The gifts were donated from the community, cheque donations from Unite the Union £150 and £50 from WF trades Council. Approximately, 100 people attended including staff/union
2. I organised another outreach in the Walthamstow Town Square on Christmas night. We organised some hot food, and refreshments/teas and coffee. We handed out the gift bags, tents, sleeping bags and toiletries. Approximately 50 people attended and we only had 2 staff members.

I want to thank Unite the Union and WF Trades Council for their generous donations. Also, the local community who rallied around and donated gifts, tents, sleeping bags, and under garments. We arranged all the donations into gift bags and handed them out to the local homeless people.



Tommy Anderson

Workers' Memorial Day, 28 April 2023

Trade unions gathered outside Waltham Forest Town Hall to mark Workers' Memorial Day and to recommit to remember the dead and fight for the living. Representatives from Unison, Unite, NUJ, NEU, PCS, Unite Community, RMT and others were joined by John Cryer, MP for Leyton.

Speakers noted the total cost of deaths, injuries, disablements and ill health at or caused by work, those costs include those to those injured, their families and friends, and society as a whole, and that the greater majority of all this is predictable and preventable. Government de-regulation and the cuts to our health and safety police, the HSE, were criticised as a major contributor to those injuries and trade unions were recognised as being fundamental to fighting to reduce those injuries.



The Death of Ekarmanjeet Singh

Mr Singh died when a roof collapsed on him whilst working on a house refurbishment in Leytonstone on 12 December 2023. Members of Waltham Forest Trades Council were joined by Redbridge Trades Council, The Construction Safety Campaign and other trade unionists at a vigil held to mark Mr Singh's death with a minutes silence.

At the vigil concern was raised regarding the recent large increase in construction workers killed at work, the failure of government and HSE to prevent this and the vital role trade unions play in reducing the damage done by work, noting you are safer at work if you are in a union. The Trades Council has made contact with Mr Singh's family in India and offered practical support.



Solidarity with the Palestinians

Since the start of the Israeli assault on Gaza on 8th October, there has been an outpouring of anger and solidarity with the Palestinian people in Waltham Forest. There have been at least nine protests in the borough involving thousands of local people in total and numerous smaller events.

The Trades Council is affiliated to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and has sponsored and supplied speakers at a number of local protests, including an 800 strong vigil in Walthamstow Market and a march organised by the local Muslim community. There have been two lobbies of John Cryer MP's offices, who refused to vote for a ceasefire. There have been three demos outside Barclays Bank in Walthamstow, organised by PSC in protest at its investments and loans to arms suppliers to Israel which attracted hundreds of local people. There have been demonstrations by Muslim parents over local schools' refusal to allow the crisis in Gaza to be discussed with children. An eight year old Palestinian boy was excluded by Barclays School in Leyton because his coat had a Palestinian flag on it. Parents at the school organised a two hundred strong protest outside the school in December which was addressed by the local NEU branch secretary and made the national news.

At our October meeting we agreed a motion condemning Israel's assault on Gaza, reaffirming our support for freedom for Palestine and supporting action by workers in the workplace in support of the Palestinian struggle. The Trades Council was one of the sponsors, along with the NEU, our largest affiliate, of the Waltham Forest Assembly for Palestine on 25th January which met to plan further solidarity activity with the Palestinians in the local area.

With no end in sight to the genocide in Gaza and the danger of a wider war in the Middle East, continuing to work with the PSC locally and supporting further solidarity activity with the Palestinians will be a key part of the activity of the Trades Council in 2024.



In a landmark case, held at Snaresbrook Crown Court, eight Palestine Action activists who used direct action to shut down the Israeli weapons trade have been acquitted of a total 12 charges which included criminal damage, burglary and encouraging criminal damage.

The charges related to an occupation of Elbit Systems drone factory in Shenstone and Oldham, actions at its weaponry factory in Kent, Elbit's London offices and the offices of Elbit's landlords, Jones Lang LaSalle. These actions were taken in order to challenge Elbit's operations and presence in Britain, to prevent their manufacture of weapons bound for Israel.

CONNAUGHT SCHOOL FOR GIRLS NEU STRIKE ACTION

NEU members at Connaught School For Girls are taking strike action against transferring your school to Star Academy.

Added to this dispute is the potential job losses and increased workload.

As well as job losses there are now other concerns such as:

- Exam factory conditions for students, with intervention sessions at weekends,

including Sundays.

- Increased stress for students.
- A top down, restricted and prescriptive curriculum.
- Detrimental conditions around pay and workload.

NEU members need to see the school prioritise investment in your education and its community.

No one wants to see more money spent on excessive CEO and

Headteacher's salaries at the expense of young people's lives.

The strike dates, so far, are as follows:

October:
11th, 12th, 13th, 17th, 18th, 19th and 31st.

November:
1st and 2nd.

■ To see how you can help, and to send messages of support, email: Sandra.faria@neu.org.uk and Pablo.phillips@neu.org.uk



TUCAN STATEMENT ON ULTRA LOW EMISSION ZONES (ULEZ)

The Trade Union Clean Air Network (TUCAN) accepts as very necessary and overdue the efforts to clean up the extremely unhealthy air we have endured for far too many years. Unhealthy air that is continuing to cause life shortening and life impacting disabilities. We fully support initiatives such as Ultra Low Emission Zones (ULEZ) and the forthcoming expansion in London. However there is much more needs discussing and doing other than just legislating for change and expecting everyone to comply or pay a fine.



These important changes will financially affect many of those who live and work in and around the affected areas, some considerably, and at a time of increasing economic difficulties for everyone, and that needs more action than currently planned.

The key to change from a trade union perspective should always be a just transition. This means once the need for change has been identified and accepted then steps must be taken to ensure those most adversely affected do not suffer any loss now or into the future as a result of that change. In fact the opposite of what historically has all too often been done, change with little or no regard for workers, communities or the environment. There are many, again especially in the current economic climate, who are disproportionately impacted by the pollution but also by the proposed solution.

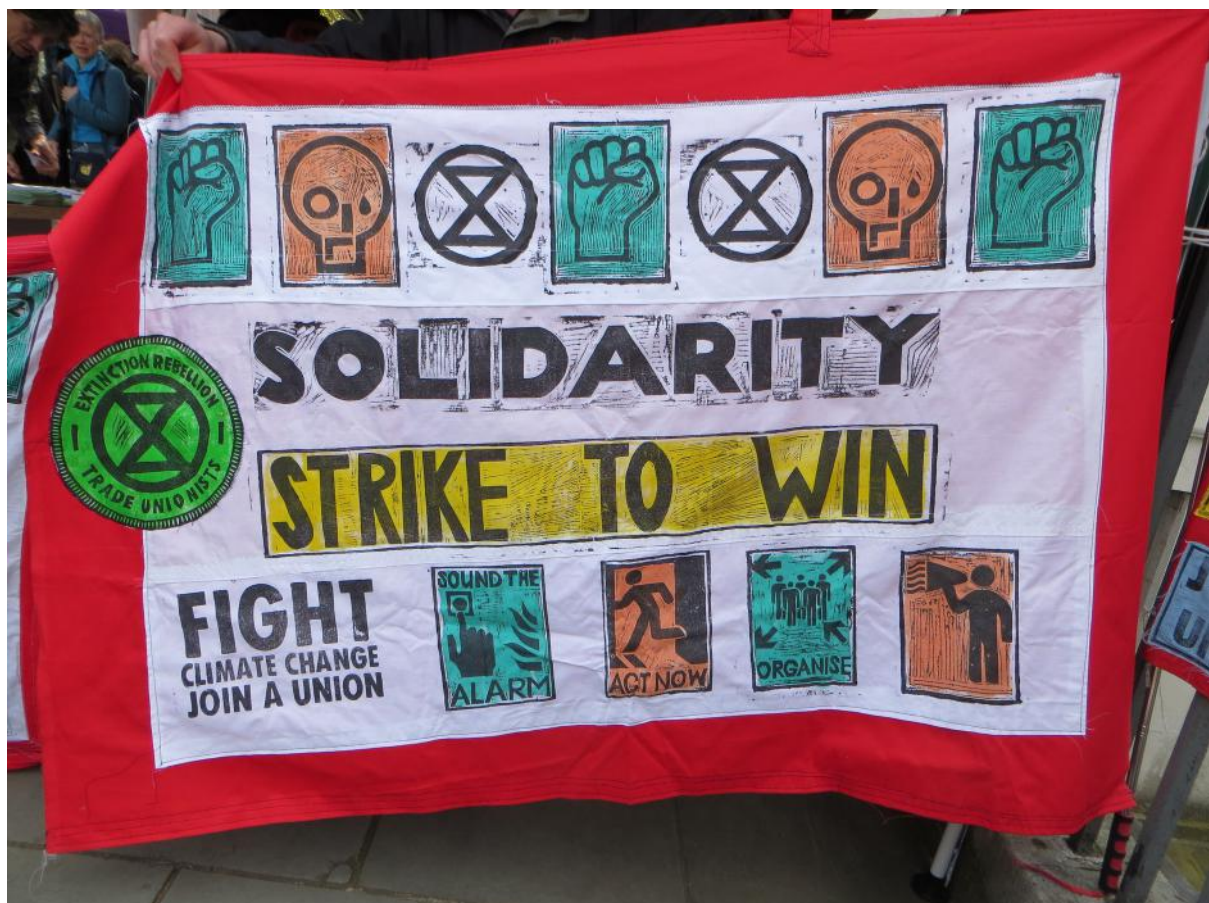
The focus with ULEZ's has been unhealthy gas and particulate emissions from older petrol and diesel vehicles by either taxing polluting vehicles coming into the zone, causing people not to enter the zone in a polluting vehicle (or using public or other transport) to avoid that tax or by changing to a vehicle that meets the ULEZ standard and therefore not having to pay the charge, with the ultimate aim of moving away from fossil fuel burning vehicles to other forms of energy consumption such as electricity.

One of the main problems with this is, for example, that whilst approximately half of Londoners do not own cars or have to for their work, over a couple of million do and very many people come into London from outside to work and they need personal transport to do this. And, whilst the London Mayor's office has recently launched a further vehicle scrappage assistance scheme to help small businesses to work into the future with less of an impact on the air we breathe it is widely regarded as no-where near enough to deal with the problem. And, if we were to achieve a massive change to electric vehicles, the infrastructure necessary to keep them going isn't there or likely to be enough in the future.

TUCAN agrees that encouraging people to use public transport rather than internal combustion engine driven vehicles or cycling or even walking are all very good things but for very many people, especially when it comes to earning a living, these are not always available, safe, reliable or sensible options – many need personal transport and in the main the burden of change is being borne by them - unfairly.

Also, whilst addressing vehicle emissions is an obvious necessity there are other issues such as pollution from planes, trains and many work activities including construction and industry as well as our homes that need equal and urgent attention which is not happening. It also doesn't address the issue of those who can afford and who choose to pay rather than replace their vehicles – those who will continue to pollute the air because they can!

TUCAN therefore believes the introduction and expansion of initiatives such as ULEZ's is a vital and necessary thing but they should not be seen as stand-alone problems resolved by standard setting and the imposition of a tax or fine for non-compliance. Rather government (national, regional and local) and employers (either by taxation or direct payments to their employees) have to step up to ensure those who need to change their necessary personal vehicles to cleaner, compliant ones are given every financial assistance to do so to avoid the burden being borne by those who can least afford it. We accept this will initially be costly but will be for everyone's benefit.



A Year in Pictures





All pics, except that of Mr Singh, copyright NUJ LFB member and Waltham Forest Trades Council delegate Mick Holder, who is very happy for them to be used (with a credit please) in support of the campaigns on SM etc. In the extremely unlikely event commercial media might wish to use them I will expect payment.