

A People's Manifesto – by Unite Community

Unite Community has been set up as a section of Unite the Union with the aim of bringing the benefits of trade unionism to those not normally eligible to join a trade union/not in work. Our members include the unemployed, the sick and disabled, students, carers, volunteers and retired workers. Working closely together with our members in workplaces, we organise people from all walks of life to strive for a society that places equality, dignity and respect above all else

Even now in the 21st century, too many people in our country have been pushed to the margins of society. They deserve to be heard; they too deserve the support to organise collectively. By extending the reach of collective organisation into communities and to those at the margins of society, we are giving them that voice. With the training we offer, we are providing them with the tools and confidence to make a real difference in their community.

Our manifesto

Unite does not set any specific campaign aims and priorities for Community members. We ask our members to campaign on the issues that are important in their communities.

Our People's manifesto is made up exclusively on those issues our members in Barnsley and Durham have decided are important enough to their communities to campaign on.

A fair welfare system providing human dignity and freedom from poverty

Welfare 'reforms' under the coalition government have torn a gaping hole in the safety net. Record numbers of people have needed to use food banks, benefit sanctions are at a record high and thousands of people have died within weeks of being found fit for work under unfair and unjust Work Capability Assessments.

We have now opened community support centres in Barnsley and Durham. Our members volunteer in these centres, using the benefit training Unite have given them to help members of the public claim all the benefits they are entitled to, and supporting them in appeals against unfair sanctions and when they are unfairly found fit to work. Through these centres, we have won tens of thousands of pounds over their first year.

At the same time, our members in both areas have taken to the streets to campaign against the reforms, make the public aware of the issues and make people aware of their rights through leaflets our members have produced. Large demonstrations have been organised, thousands of advice leaflets have been distributed and our members have helped dozens of people with their benefit claims.

Several of our members volunteer in their local food banks, and we collect donations through our offices. More recently, two of our members in Durham have set up a Socialist Clothes bank running alongside a local food bank having realised that people who can't afford to feed their families are also struggling to clothe them. Further clothes banks are in the pipeline.

To help ensure a fair welfare system offering human dignity and freedom from poverty, Unite Community members want:

- Benefits that are paid promptly and fairly
- An end to cruel and unjust benefit sanctions, and the end of the Work Capability Assessment
- Repeal of the bedroom tax

- Workers and claimants to be treated with respect, and no targets to cut benefits for workers

A public transport system designed to meet people's needs

When South Yorkshire transport authority voted to end free train travel and restrict the times that they could use their bus passes, our elderly and disabled members joined forces with others across the County to fight against this unfair decision, made with absolutely no public discussion.

After a huge public meeting they agreed to stage weekly Freedom Rides which saw people boarding trains and refusing to pay for travel, before meeting up with other 'freedom riders' from Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield to hold rallies.

Despite heavy police efforts to stop them, hundreds of people took part in freedom rides and they gained the full support of local transport unions, who spoke at their rallies. After weeks of freedom rides and massive political pressure the transport authority offered partial concessions. Whilst celebrating their achievements at a victory rally, campaigners voted to continue campaigning until they received the full concessions which were removed, and the campaign continues.

Our members have joined the railway unions in their campaigns to keep the east coast mainline service in public hands, and for the renationalisation of our railways. They have been involved in leafleting passengers and stations and lobbying local MPs to support these measures.

Unite Community believes that transport is an essential public service and should be designed to serve the needs of people, not to make a profit from. Our members want:

- Free travel for all pensioners and the disabled
- Nationalisation of the Rail Industry
- Bus services brought back under the control of local authorities to create fully integrated, affordable public transport.

Stand in Solidarity with others and support un-organised workers

'Divide and Rule' tactics by politicians and media have attempted to deflect attention from the failings of the financial system by pointing the finger at the unemployed, the disabled and immigrants and seeking to create divisions between different groups. Language like "strivers and shirkers" has sought to divide workers from non-workers. Our members have fought to overcome these divisions.

Unite Community members have stood on picket lines alongside members of Unite, PCS, GMB, Unison, RMT, ASLEF, FBU and other unions when their members are on strike. They have shown they support workers in struggle rather than tell them they are lucky to have a job.

It's a lot harder for the bosses to tell workers there are plenty of people who could replace them when those workers can point to the unemployed people who have joined their picket line in solidarity.

Our members have joined TUC marches and demonstrations, helped at TUC stalls demanding a living wage, demonstrated against zero-hours contracts and supported the Baker's Union BAFWU in their "Fast Food Rights" campaign.

We help with Unites Industrial strategy and actively recruit workers to the Industrial side of the Union. We have done this at building sites, IT Companies and at Motor parts factories. We see the attack on workers' rights and the attack on benefit claimants as one and the same battle Sanctions, Workfare, Zero Hours Contracts and unstable agency work create a culture of fear and vulnerability.

Unite members have returned solidarity with Community members by supporting their demonstrations and through financial donations, where they 'sponsor' new members for a year when they would not otherwise be able to afford even the 50p a week for Unite Community membership.

By standing in solidarity with each other we can work to create a better society for everyone. Our members want:

- Full repeal of all the anti-trade union laws to enable all workers to organise effectively
- A living wage for all workers
- An end to zero-hours contracts
- Real apprenticeships for young people, no more "workfare"

A voice for the voiceless

Unite Community members are offered a range of free support and training to increase their skills in the job market and to empower them politically. As well as formal courses such as CV writing skills and IT qualifications, they are trained how to organise in their communities and ensure their voice is heard by local decision makers, councillors and MPs.

By offering them courses in public speaking, using new/social media and influencing people through discussion & debate we have helped the previously voiceless find their voice. In several areas we have succeeded in shifting the political debate to better reflect the views of our members.

Our members' views are reflected in this People's Manifesto and we in Unite Community want other people to join us in creating a mass movement of those overlooked and under-represented politically.

We want to give enough people voices to make the calls for our manifesto items become too loud to be ignored.