# Unite Community Branch

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 October

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| VENUE | Newcastle Unite Building |
| TIME | 1.00 pm–2.53 pm |
| CHAIR | Deryck Marsh |
| BRANCH SECRETARY | Alec McFadden |

## 1. WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

The Chair, Deryck Marsh, welcomed members and three guests from Humberside representing the Headscarf Revolutionaries campaign. Members were invited to introduce themselves and outline their branch responsibilities.

## 2. APOLOGIES

Pam Worsley; Diane Jones; Rachel Jameson; Brian Topping; Roger Nettleship; Yunus Bakjsh; Stu Hill; Linda Hoffman; Chris Lawlor; Terry McPartlan; David Stead; Anne Brown; Geoff Stokle (13).

## 3. ATTENDANCE

### 3.1 Present in person

Keith Lakeman; Deryck Marsh; Chris Barnes; Alan Robinson; Clare Robinson; James Shields; Martin Dent; Paul Mayne; Alec McFadden; Christine Lee; Jimmy Shields; Tracey Henry; Denise, Fred (14).

### 3.2 Present online

Kevin Flynn; Jo Walton; Steve Hanson; Simon Galliers; Steve Fairfax; Steve Grinter; Christine Smith; Liz Panton; Norman Jemison; Sylvia Flynn; Christine Lomas; Rob Denison; Garry Baker; and three participants who had not signed in (16).

## 4. HEADSCARF REVOLUTIONARIES CAMPAIGN

Tracy Henry, representing the Humberside campaign, gave a detailed and moving presentation on the Headscarf Revolutionaries and the campaign to commemorate their achievements.

### Historical background

Tracy described the importance of trawler fishing to Hull and Humberside, where the industry employed thousands of men. She explained that the work was highly dangerous, safety regulation was limited and workers lacked trade union representation, while the sale of fish generated substantial profits.

She recounted the triple trawler tragedy of early 1968, when three trawlers sank within less than three weeks in severe weather off Iceland. Fifty-eight men died and only one survived.

The loss devastated Humberside and fishing communities throughout the UK.

### The safety campaign

Tracy explained that four working-class women from the fishing community—Lilian Bilocca, Yvonne Blenkinsop, Marry Dennes and Christine Smallbone—formed the Hessle Road Women's Committee. They developed an 88-point safety charter, known as the Fishermen's Charter, and collected more than 10,000 petition signatures in less than six weeks.

Although the women and trawlermen were not union members, local Transport and General Workers' Union (T&GWU) officers supported the campaign and its demand for a meeting with Prime Minister Harold Wilson.

According to the presentation, the four women travelled to London with a leading local T&GWU officer to meet Harold Wilson. The negotiations secured agreement on the vast majority of the charter's safety measures, some of which were introduced immediately.

The measures described included:

- A mandatory wireless radio and radio operator on every trawler before it could go to sea.
- Full staffing and appropriate training for seafarers.
- A medical ship with doctors and full medical equipment stationed in Arctic fishing waters.

### Backlash and lasting impact

Tracy described the campaign as a major success but explained that the women faced male chauvinism and hostility encouraged by trawler owners.

Owners complained that the new safety requirements prevented boats from sailing and reduced profits. Tracy reported that the four campaign leaders were blacklisted and unable to find work, and that some trawlermen initially reacted negatively towards them. She also described tensions caused by owners allowing foreign boats to sell fish in Humberside.

Tracy emphasised the charter's lasting importance, crediting it with saving hundreds of fishermen's lives over the years.

### Commemorative statue and fundraising

Tracy reported growing interest among younger generations in the Headscarf Revolutionaries. The local Maritime Museum and community were seeking to honour the four women and their contribution to fishing safety in Hull and internationally.

A committee had been established to commission a bronze statue in central Hull. Tracey and Denise were leading members of the committee, which aimed to raise the necessary funds by 2027.

The Unite Regional Committee was supporting the fundraising and awareness campaign and had made an initial donation of £5,000. Regional Secretary Karen Raey had written to all Unite branches seeking support. Tracy explained that this appeal had brought her into contact with Branch Secretary Alec McFadden, who was now involved in the campaign.

Members warmly applauded the presentation. The Chair thanked Tracy for her contribution and congratulated those involved in the campaign.

Questions and discussion

More than 12 members contributed to the discussion. Tracy and Denise answered the questions raised.

Discussion covered poverty in fishing communities, the risks taken by seafarers and the vulnerability of workers without union representation. Tracy explained that fishermen could spend weeks at sea and return with substantial earnings, earning the description “three-day millionaires”. These earnings often ran out quickly, and families sometimes pawned the men’s best clothes to buy food while they were away at sea.

Tracy also described how teenagers were sometimes placed in domestic service with wealthy families.

Resolutions

**Motion 1 — Support for the campaign**

That the branch formally support the awareness and fundraising campaign for a statue honouring the four working-class women.

**Proposed:** Alec McFadden. **Seconded:** Kevin. **Outcome:** Agreed unanimously.

**Motion 2 — Recognition of regional support**

That the branch congratulate the Unite Regional Committee on its prompt support for the campaign.

**Proposed:** Alec McFadden. **Seconded:** Deryck, Chair. **Outcome:** Agreed unanimously.

The Chair invited the speakers to remain for the rest of the meeting and to join a group photograph.

## 5. PREVIOUS MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the September meeting were agreed as a true record.

The matter arising concerned speakers for future meetings. Neither Mary Williams nor Monica Taylor had been able to attend this meeting.

## 6. TREASURER’S REPORT

Linda was unable to attend but had provided a full written report to the Secretary. The report was accepted with thanks.

## 7. DELEGATES’ REPORTS

Detailed verbal reports were received from the following Trade Union Councils:

- Newcastle TUC
- North Tyneside TUC
- Sunderland TUC
- South Tyneside TUC

The reports were warmly received. Kevin congratulated Keith on his Sunderland report, which outlined recovery from difficulties, including the absence of a Workers' Memorial event that year.

The Secretary reminded all elected delegates of their responsibility to report back to branch meetings.

## 8. SECRETARY'S REPORT

Problems continued with regional administration, particularly the circulation of branch meeting invitations and access to membership lists, although some progress had been made.

The branch activists' contact list now contained more than 100 people, who would receive regular updates.

Progress was reported in discussions with Hull City and Sunderland AFC concerning the Headscarf Revolutionaries campaign.

**Follow-up requested:** Kevin asked the Chair and Secretary to speak again with reception and administration about improving the meeting room's IT facilities.

## 9. FUTURE OF THE COMMUNITY SECTOR

Kevin reported that progress had been slow. However, the forthcoming national conference offered an opportunity to discuss a more equal role for the Community Sector with the General Secretary, comparable to that of the Retired Members Sector.

The Chair agreed and stressed the importance of all elected delegates attending the conference and working together.

**Clarification required:** Whether Diane Jones would be able to attend.

**Agreed:** A full report back from the conference would be included on the agenda for the November branch meeting.

## 10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Calais delegation

Christine Lomas proposed that a report from a recent delegation to Calais, including conditions relating to immigration, be the main item at the November meeting. This was agreed.

Regional education

Steve Hansom outlined a new education process in which he was involved at regional level. Further information would be provided at the next meeting.

Future meeting venues

Clare highlighted regular meetings at Gateshead CAU linked to street campaigning.

**Agreed:** The November and January branch meetings would take place at Newcastle Unite Building. The February branch meeting would be held at Gateshead CAU.

**Meeting closed:** 2.53 pm.

## NEXT MEETING

**Friday 27 November, 1.00 pm**
Newcastle Unite Building

**Alec McFadden**

Branch Secretary

Tel: 07831637531