



UNISON

TRADE
UNIONISM
&
INDUSTRIAL
ACTION



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WHAT ARE TRADE UNIONS?

A trade union (or simply, a union) is an organisation of workers that protects or improves the conditions of employment of the workers it represents.

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Unions both provide workers with **collective bargaining power**, allowing them to negotiate working conditions with employers, as well as **protecting individual workers** from detriment and job loss.

OVER
1.3 Million
PEOPLE ARE MEMBERS
OF UNISON

SOME WELL KNOWN TRADE UNIONS

UCU



UNISON



IWGB



RMT



UNITE



CWU



WHAT DO UNIONS DO?

Unions promote and safeguard the interests and rights of workers in a given workplace or sector. This can either mean negotiating or taking action to improve wages or working conditions, or to foster workplace wellbeing in other ways.

INDUSTRIAL ACTION



When workers withdraw their labour (stop working), **employers cannot deliver goods and services to customers and benefit from them financially.** Industrial action can take various forms: it might mean a strike, action short of strike, or other ways of withdrawing labour that are more specific to a given workplace (such as a marking boycott at a university).

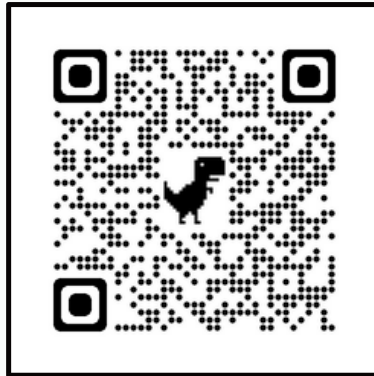
Industrial action forces employers to recognise the value of the labour that workers do, and allows workers leverage in bargaining with employers for various causes, such as **better pay** or **working conditions** or addressing issues like **unjust workplace policies or unfair dismissals.**

... AND MUCH MORE!

Going on strike isn't all there is to a union! Industrial action is always the last resort - unions can and do approach employers for negotiations **without the intention of striking**, and it is only if **employers refuse negotiations** or won't agree to reasonable demands that a union will ballot its members for strike action. Unions also:

- provide their members with mutual aid, such as **legal advice** to help fight back against unfair employers, or **financial support** to cover wages lost due to striking
- create a sense of **community** in the workplace and hold social events
- promote **values** such as workers' rights and solidarity between workers

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?



If you have a job, chances are you can join a trade union!
Scan the QR code above to use the online union finder tool made by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and find a union that's right for you:

HOW MUCH IS MEMBERSHIP?

Membership fees vary depending on the union and your wages; sometimes membership is free.

For example: if your annual salary is £8,000-£11,000, your monthly membership fee for Unison is **£6.60**. That's less than a Netflix subscription, and protects you from exploitative employers!

I CAN'T/DON'T WANT TO JOIN, HOW CAN I SUPPORT ANYWAY?

VISIT A PICKET LINE

FIND A JOB IN A
UNION

ENGAGE WITH
THEIR CONTENT
(TWEETS, STORIES,
LEAFLETS, EVENTS
ETC.)

UNIONS ON CAMPUS

Most unionised workers on campus belong to either **UCU** or **Unison**.

UCU (University and College Union) represents those who work to deliver higher education in the UK. This includes **academic staff** such as lecturers and teaching assistants, but **also includes non-academic staff**, such as some members of professional services staff. **Postgraduate students can also join UCU.**



Unison, the largest trade union in the UK, represents **various workers in public services**, including NHS workers. On campus, you can find Unison members working at **the library, in professional services or as cleaners or security staff**, among other places. **If you work for the Students' Union, for example at Ground Café or the Village Shop, you can also join Unison.**

Other unions on campus include:



CAMPUS UNIONS IN ACTION

QM Unison's research recently uncovered that **the university has been underpaying its staff since 2006**. This disproportionately affects the lowest paid staff on campus, including BAPoC staff and women. As a result, the branch is **campaigning for pay increases and full back pay for everyone affected by the underpayment**.



Check out their **petition** for more information, and sign and share to support them!



In 2021, QMUL instituted a policy whereby **anyone participating in industrial action would be deducted 100% of their wages indefinitely** until withheld work had been made up for, despite otherwise working to contract. While taking industrial action as part of UCU's national campaign, QMUCU challenged this policy with additional local strike days and a marking boycott in 2022.

While the fight against the 100% cuts policy continues, the marking boycott led to **an agreement securing important victories** on reducing precarious contracts and ensuring fair workloads.

HOW CAN I HELP?

- **Show your support!** Visit pickets and share the unions' social media posts
- **Let uni management know you support the unions.** You can do this by emailing the Council or the Principal's office; check out linktr.ee/QM_CS for email templates!

HISTORY OF TRADE UNIONS IN THE EAST END

The origins of the trade unions of today can be traced back to 18th-century Britain, where industrialisation and urbanisation created a new socioeconomic class: the worker. Beginning with fits of spontaneous collective action and developing into modern trade unions, cities became active sites of workers' struggle.

The early unions were subjected to severe repression: the Combination Act of 1779 banned trade unions and collective bargaining by workers, and although the 1825 revisions to the Act legalised unions, it still banned the right to collective bargaining, suppressed the right to strike and criminalised picketing. Even so, by this time trade unions had already become widespread. **Unions and industrial action weren't fully legalised in Britain until 1872**, after a Royal Commission on Trade Unions agreed that the establishment of unions was to the advantage of both employers and employees. **The East End of London, owing to its role as both the port and the workshop of the capital of the British Empire, has a long history of culturally diverse workers' struggle.**

Cheap accommodation and the availability of work made the East End attractive to successive waves of immigrants, and the proximity of the docks brought in seafarers from all over the world. European immigrants, such as French Huguenots, Irish Catholics and Eastern European Jews, became silk-weavers and tailors or worked in the docks. Bengali seamen in the Empire's merchant navy jumped ship and began chains of immigration that have endured to the present day. Unions and collective workers' struggle were often the main channel through which the diverse community of the East End could make their voices heard and lives protected.



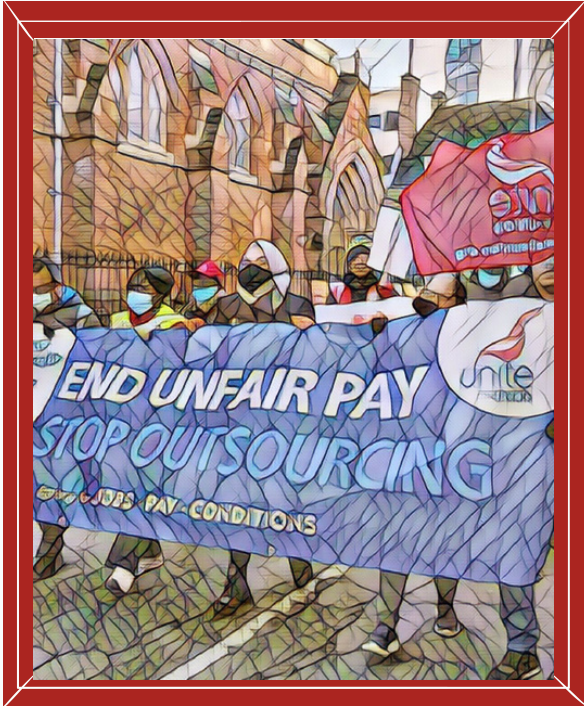
Our husbands are on strike; for
the wives it is not honey
And we all think it is not right
to pay the landlord money.
Everyone is on strike; so
landlords do not be offended.
The rent that's due we'll pay
when the strike is ended.

Banner over Hungerford Street
(*Newcastle Daily Chronicle* 1889)

1889 “STRIKE FEVER”

The late Victorian era saw a proliferation of industrial action, such as the 1888 **Bryant and May matchgirls' strike**. In the autumn of the following year, however, East London experienced a wave of **more than fifty strikes**; striking workers included dockworkers and Jewish tailors, with reports of rent strikes happening on Commercial Road and Hungerford Street.

MORE RECENTLY...



In less distant history, the community-based organisation The East London Citizens Organisation (TELCO) started **a living-wage campaign in 2001**, fighting for better pay and working conditions for cleaners at big banks based in Canary Wharf. The broad public support for this campaign and the small victories gained the attention of the unions, and **in 2004, Unite started the Justice for Cleaners (JfC) campaign to unionise cleaners**, a majority of whom were from minority ethnic groups, at the financial centre Canary Wharf. The campaign was relatively successful with the union setting up **a specific branch for cleaners comprising around 2000 members**.

In addition, Unite established **a national Migrant Workers Support Unit (MWSU)** designed to provide key services, such as translation and advice on employment rights to migrant worker members. The JfC campaign was **diffused to other sectors and was picked up by other unions**, such as the RMT that also started a campaign for cleaners among migrant workers in the London Underground transport network.



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