

Dear Colleague

## **REGIONAL SUPERVISION & CHARGES AGAINST THE BRANCH**

We wrote to the Chair of the Development and Organising Committee and candidate for General Secretary (Andrea Egan) and the President of our Union (Steve North) who have both confirmed that the only people in the UK who can lift this unfair suspension of the Branch are either the Scottish Convenor or the Scottish Secretary in Scotland (the region).

Given that all of the complaints the branch made about paid staff bullying, harassing and breaching union rules between June and September last year were made against the Regional Secretary's own team this makes it almost impossible to resolve because we have a situation where the region is, effectively, being allowed to mark its own homework. We further believe that the Branch was victimised in response to the formal complaints it raised and that this explains, in part, the motivations for placing the branch under supervision, of those accused who have not been suspended or investigated but rather given complete control of the running of the branch. Remember that the report to request regional supervision was written by the Region (signed off by the Convenor & the Regional Secretary – Mark Ferguson and Lilian Macer – in post since August 2023). The Branch has still not had sight of the report and contrary to a statement made by Janet Stewart at a members' meeting last week, did not ever meet the Region to discuss the threat of supervision and what we could do to avoid this. Indeed, the Branch remains in the dark about these matters other than being aware that the relationship with the region was very strained and had resulted in our four complaints (still unresolved) between June and September 2024. Janet's statement that there were six meetings is untrue and unsubstantiated

We have recently pointed out the region's failure to follow procedure on this matter (see below) and we believe this explains why Janet Stewart is now going round claiming that these meetings took place when they did not.

*"should concerns arise regarding the functioning of any Branch, **the Regional Secretary will attempt to address these with the Branch Officials either directly or through the appropriate Organiser(s) and Regional Manager under G 9.3.3.**"*  
*Regional supervision - Guidelines for Regions - May 2021*

Despite several requests to meet the Regional Convenor and Regional Secretary in December and January, no meetings have yet taken place to resolve the still unknown issues the region had with the Branch and how we get the Branch out of the hands of Corporate UNISON and back to where it belongs – under elected lay control.

Although meeting dates were agreed, they wouldn't meet with our choice of delegation. We offered to meet informally at evenings or weekends to try to fix this but to no avail They are saying that as they have now made (still unknown) charges against one of our delegation they cannot meet even though our complaints against one of their side (including bullying and harassment) made between June and September last year and still not investigated sees members of their side not only free to run our Branch but also free to negotiate with employers on your behalf without being accountable to anyone. One of our Officers was told that the suspension (to allow investigations) would not be extended. Despite this, "someone" wrote to request the extension which was granted for another month. This, we believe, was for the sole purpose of removing our delegates from discussions and negotiations and from the future of the Branch.

We wrote to the Regional Secretary on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December to request a copy of the actions they are looking for to return the Branch to lay (our) control and a copy of the report which details allegations against the branch. We have requested this from a number of people since the whole suspension began (79) days ago). To go almost 3 months without a shred of evidence is as shocking as it is infuriating especially as our stewards across Scotland remain on strike against

Corporate UNISON. Damage is being wreaked on our jobs, negotiations, and terms and conditions under the full-time officers who are seeking to undermine this strike in every way they can think of including spreading untruths and issuing phoney communications to the membership every Friday under the name UNISON Scotland Further Education Branch.

These processes to attack progressive Branches have been used for a long time by corporate UNISON to oust people who do not follow the corporate line. These tactics are well known and the Campaign group within UNISON "Time For Real Change" currently standing for election have made the following demand this year acknowledging the situation:

*"We must end once and for all the punitive culture of disciplinary action and where investigations take far too long. We need a fair consistent and robust complaints procedure across all parts of the union"*

*"We believe this mean that elected members should run our union not appointed full-time officials"*

*Time For Real Change*

We await news of meetings with the delegates your stewards have proposed, and we will keep you updated if there is any progress. In the meantime, your striking stewards are working on further plans which we will advise you of shortly.

There are eleven Branch Officers and only three have received charges, albeit undetailed and vague. It is, therefore, extremely odd that the Region decided to suspend the whole Branch regardless and is, in our view, designed to allow them to conclude key negotiations while your negotiators are conveniently out of the way. This is essentially a political hijacking. Despite requests, no explanation was provided as to why all officers were removed.

The regional supervision procedure says the following on the matter:

*Following discussions with the Regional Convenor(s) the Regional Secretary will liaise with the Regional Management Team and complete the Request for regional supervision Form and submit to the D&O Committee. **The request form will detail which functions the Branch will remain responsible for (if appropriate) and which functions the Region will take responsibility for at the start of the supervision. Dependant on the circumstances for seeking regional supervision, a decision may need to be made with the Regional Convenor(s) on whether any elected Branch officials can continue in their position.***

*Regional supervision - Guidelines for Regions - May 2021*

## **INVESTIGATIONS**

Four Branch Officers and stewards have been advised that the region has made accusations against them and that these require investigation. None of them have been provided with any detail or evidence against them and all are genuinely confused and incredulous at the whole situation. As you can imagine, though, it is extremely stressful and impacts on health and wellbeing to have unsubstantiated allegations hanging over your head for months while Corporate UNISON use delaying tactics to remove you from the playing field. We believe these allegations are trumped up and they are politically motivated and designed to remove key Branch Officers from post and from negotiations, Why else would four separate charges arrive 'out of the blue' on doorsteps of stewards and activists at the same time as the Branch is also being accused and has been placed in Regional Supervision? This is designed with a plan in mind and stinks of corruption and corporate bullying. Our branch would not accept this from the worst of employers so why are we being expected to accept it from paid staff at UNISON?

## NEGOTIATIONS

Despite your negotiators being excluded, corporate staff continue to plough ahead with new negotiations. These have never been discussed with the Branch prior to the coup on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November. On Job Evaluation we remain particularly concerned about some of the statements made to try to justify their new position for which they have absolutely no democratic mandate.

Members should read our response to the Scottish Parliament's Public Audit Committee and corporate UNISON's response to the same committee and compare and contrast. Corporate UNISON tried to have our evidence removed from the eyes of parliamentary scrutineers without success. They do not appear to understand that they do not have the only say in a civilised democracy. See contemptuous communication referring to us as 'some activists' and quite incredibly telling **us** not to operate out with the union's democratic structures when their submission was made without reference to the established and democratically reached position.

*"We need to make you aware that we have had to contact the Chair of the PAC to repudiate the submission some activists made. The submission was not created through our union's structures or approved through your branch committee and, as such, there is no democratic mandate for the authors to provide a submission to the committee. We have, in light of this, requested your submission is removed from the website as soon as possible to avoid any misunderstanding of what UNISON's position on Job Evaluation in Scotland's Colleges is. We trust that it will now be clear to you why we have had to take this step and we would ask that you do not operate out with the democratic structures of the union"*  
Corporate UNISON

These attempts to suppress truth-telling to our members is comparable to when they even threatened stewards with allegations of criminality if they continued to make contact with members on our contact lists for the strike campaign. They do not want the real story to come out to members or to anyone else. We believe that leadership means you find a way to resolve issues. Instead, there has been a continued failure of corporate leaders to accept our delegation and convene talks. They have sought, instead, to have the truth hidden from the membership.

Concerns about the integrity of the data seem to be what corporate leaders at UNISON are using to seek to justify their sudden adoption of the employers' position on negotiations on JE. They are suggesting two reasons for the data being unusable. One is that members "over-egged" the questionnaire responses and managers didn't stop them. The employers' position is that HR should have been involved to prevent this as though HR would somehow know your roles better than you or your manager. This is obviously an attempt to try to suppress the score. There are a few odd scores which is commonplace in any job evaluation scheme and would have been picked up in the quality review had that work been carried through to completion. UNISON paid staff were involved when the JE project plan was agreed all those years ago but are now trying to lead us to believe that they were unsighted on this part of the process. The process was designed by a JE expert formerly of Northgate and agreed with the Unions including the Regional Manager at the time John Gallacher. This negotiation took place before the Branch was established and we would have thought UNISON would have taken advice before agreeing the process with so much at stake for our members. The Regional Manager was also secretary to the machinery for support staff. This was a matter for Corporate UNISON and the Local Government Branches at the time and not one single person raised a concern. Two subsequent full-time officers in charge with supporting FE afterwards, also joint secretaries, raised no issues about the process and data. Only after the fourth full-time officer came on board and after nine months had elapsed did her apparent concerns emerge. The admission by the full-time officer that perhaps UNISON Corporate were at fault for not getting further advice is astonishing, but we believe phoney. We are aware that UNISON is terrified of members suing them over this and has some history of botched approaches to JE in other sectors, but they should not take a safe route with a bad deal for our members in order to protect themselves from litigation.

Our negotiating position, agreed with you the members remains, national pay and grading, no detriment to any staff member, an ongoing national JE process which is fair and transparent and

for all staff to be included in scope of the exercise. Any deviation from that position and new approach to scoring needs to be agreed with you our members, let's see how that progresses.

Job Evaluation is not and was never about Job Evaluation on its own. It was always about a means to consistently create job scores across the sector in order that we could move to harmonise pay. To suggest otherwise is taking the employer's line.

### **CORPORATE UNISONS PHONEY FRIDAY UPDATES**

You will, no doubt, receive more updates from Corporate UNISON. As many of you are now realising, these updates in correspondence and in meetings are becoming more unreliable and even more fantastical by the day.

We are asking you not to do as they are doing but instead to support the striking stewards. Do not attend their meetings, do not stand as a steward and become responsible for decisions they will not let you influence.

Instead, remind them who pays their wages and that the members lead this union and will not tolerate this blatant assault on democracy and hijacking of our branch.

**Remember you should still contact them for support whenever you need it.**

Support your elected officers and don't be a strike-breaker! Be a strike supporter!

**PLEASE SIGN AND SHARE THE PETITION AS WIDELY AS YOU CAN WITH ALL YOUR CONTACTS OR COLLEAGUES, FRIENDS AND FAMILY** and remember that you need to click on the verification link for your signature to count  
- <https://www.change.org/StandUpForFEReps>

For more regular updates, please follow the Facebook ([www.facebook.com/SolidarityForFE/](http://www.facebook.com/SolidarityForFE/)) or Twitter page (@StandUp4FEReps)

Any questions, please get in touch.