UNISON Tower Hamlets Unison

(Hybrid) BRANCH MEETING

Council Chamber/Teams

12 September 2024, 12.30pm

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. NJC Pay offer & ballot
   - Branch Secretary
   - Guest speaker: Gabby Lawler, UNISON Local Government Service Group Executive

3. LGPS Divestment Campaign
   - Branch Secretary
   - Guest speaker: Sybil Cock, Palestine Solidarity Campaign National Executive Committee

4. Motions
5. AOB – Chair to be notified in advance.

Motion 1

Divest the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) from human rights abuses, occupation, death and destruction.

This Branch notes:

- The recent humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza as a result of the Israeli state's relentless bombardment and the ever-growing climate emergency has thrown a spotlight on how local authorities invest their pensions funds.
- Across the UK campaigns are building to press councils to divest millions of pounds from companies that are complicit in/profit from the occupation of Palestine and the violation of Palestinian human rights; invest in weaponry and surveillance technology and/or are involved in the exploration/processing of fossil fuels. Some councils, such as Waltham Forest and Islington, have already made concrete divestment commitments - demonstrating that where there is the will, there is a way.
- The threat posed by fossil fuelled climate change is real and urgent. Investments in fossil fuels are not only harmful to the environment but put the sustainable future of pensions at risk. Investing local government pension funds in fossil fuels is fuelling climate change and toxic air pollution, entrenching failing energy systems, fuelling repressive regimes, and contradicting political commitments to tackle climate change.
- The Tower Hamlets LGPS has millions of pounds of assets in a variety of investments. Council staff and those working for Admitted body status employers providing local public services pay into the LGPS over the lifetime of their employment. Employers also pay in contributions. This pot of money is invested by the council with oversight from the Pensions Committee who act as Trustees. On retirement workers draw their pension from the Fund.
- It appears that most of the Fund is handed over to the London Common Investment Vehicle (CIV) who act as investment managers for the 32 London boroughs.
- UNISON has well established policy developed through its democratic structures which calls on councils to divest their Pension Funds from companies involved in fossil fuels and companies profiting from/connected to the violation of Palestinian human rights.
- Some activity, but not sustained work, has been done to give this policy active expression in Tower Hamlets.

This Branch believes:

- It is time for our council to disclose and divest, if necessary, its Pension Fund and ensure that the assets are ethically invested.
- That we all want to have a comfortable retirement at the end of a long working life - but no one wants to live off of 'blood' money.
- That the TH LGPS fund (which is made up of public money and the deferred wages of public sector workers) should not be used to

fund, prop up or profit from human rights violations, occupation, death and destruction.
- Properly planned ethical investment over time can ensure that the scheme is robust, healthy and that its financial obligations are met.

This Branch resolves:

1. To support and encourage members to take part in the local community campaign that has recently formed to press the council to disclose its LGPS fund investments and for the Pensions Committee to bring forward a roadmap to divest LGPS assets from any companies/investments that are:

   - Involved with/profit from the exploration and/or mining/or processing of oil, coal and gas.
   - On the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) list of Companies Linked to Illegal Settlement in the Occupied West Bank.
   - On the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) National Committee BDS Sanctions List.
   - Manufacture/supply weapons and military technology to the Israeli government used in violations of international law.

2. To support the lobby of the Pensions Committee on Monday 30 September, 5.30pm and encourage members to attend.

3. To instruct Branch Officers to approach the Council to press them to allow a UNISON representative to be Co-opted onto the Pension Committee.

Motion 2 (time allowing)

Stand Up Against the Far Right

This Branch notes:

- Many UNISON members have been shocked at the way mobs of racists have sought to use tragic events in Southport to divide and spread hate - based on mistruths and false information.
- Far right thugs have taken to the streets of Southport, Hartlepool, London and more to attack emergency service workers, to target Muslim communities with xenophobic hatred and to terrorise refugees – not doubt emboldened by the hate rhetoric of politicians like Farage and Braverman.
- The racist social influencer, Tommy Robinson, has recently organised demonstrations in central London which shockingly have attracted thousands of followers.
- In response over the summer thousands of anti-racists (including from TH UNISON) took to the streets of London to attend mobilisations organised by Stand Up to Racism to protect immigration and refugee services targeted by racists/fascists; and to declare that ‘refugees are welcome here’ - and racists are not.

This Branch believes:

- The far right is organising and are on the march.
- Trade unions have always been at the heart of efforts to unite communities and stand against hate. Unity is our strength, and we will stand firm against those that aim to pit different workers and communities against each other.
- We need to be part of building a mass campaign to beat back the racists on the streets, stop the far right, and unite against racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism.

This Branch resolves:

- To donate £150 to the Stand Up to Racism Unity Fund set up to organise against the new wave of far-right activity seen over the summer.
- Publicise and encourage attendance at Stand up to Racism demonstrations and counter-mobilisations.

(If there is inadequate time this motion will be referred back to the Branch Committee)