

**WORK** stress

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**Hazards  
Campaign**

**Newsletter Summer 2012**

## **HARD TIMES, GREAT EXPECTATIONS and VICTORIAN VALUES**

*The Network's Annual Conference, scheduled for November 2012, has a Dickensian theme, and not only because this is his centenary.....*

When Charles Dickens was writing, working people led grim lives at the mercy of rapacious employers in often unhealthy and dangerous conditions. Many employers considered the daily sacrifice of the lives of workers the unavoidable and acceptable price of economic growth, attacking any attempt to legislate for better working conditions as a 'burden on businesses'. Thank goodness those days are gone, thanks to the campaigning of workers themselves and the introduction down the years of health and safety legislation. However, the attitudes that led to such conditions are far from dead – indeed they are very much alive just now.

Health and Safety protections for people at work are once more under attack. David Cameron describes health and safety at work legislation as a 'monster'. Christopher Grayling, Secretary of State in the Department for Work and Pensions, has slashed the HSE budget by 35%. Millions of employees in so-called 'safe' occupations outside of the nuclear, chemical and offshore sectors have been abandoned to the mercy of employers who can be confident that they will never see an HSE inspector let alone face enforcement action. Hard times, indeed!

Levels of debilitating stress in the workplace and the serious, sometimes fatal, mental and physical illnesses that ensue continue to rise amongst all employees – there are NO 'safe' workplaces. If an uncaring Government won't, and a stretched HSE increasingly can't wage war on this 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace epidemic, how are workers to defend

themselves? Can we have any realistic great expectations?

This conference will consider amongst others, the effect of Government cuts on levels of workplace stress (including the increased pressure on workplace representatives), on the mental health of workers and on relationships within the workplace. The conference will examine possible ways forward.

*Further details of this event, and a booking form, may be found towards the end of this Newsletter.*

### **Swindon hospital workers vote to strike over 'bullying'**

Support workers at Swindon's Great Western Hospital have voted for strike action over alleged managerial "bullying and harassment".

Union GMB, which represents 150 of Carillion's 200-strong workforce, said 97.3% of voters backed action in a strike ballot earlier and added that the company's "intransigence" was "leaving members with few options".

Carillion said it was "very disappointed" as the collective grievance was still being investigated.

GMB said its members, who work as porters, cleaners and domestic staff at the hospital, "feel very strongly" that they are being harassed and bullied and that "the system for booking holidays is unfair". The union said it had submitted a formal complaint by 109 staff over allegations of bullying in December.

Spokesman Andy Newman said: "Many of our members have spoken to me and said that although they don't want a strike, they don't see any other way of getting Carillion to treat them with respect at work. A strike now seems inevitable"

A spokesperson for Carillion said: "The process is due to be concluded this week and it is unfortunate that a decision to strike has been

taken ahead of the conclusion of that investigation and ahead of a planned catch-up meeting with GMB next week. We are disappointed with the decision to strike.

## **FOCUS on SCOTLAND: Three reports from north of the border...**

### **1. Tackle teacher stress or pay, says union**

Schools must tackle soaring teacher stress, Scottish teaching union EIS has said. The union says excessive workloads and poor management are causing physical and mental injuries to teaching staff. EIS was speaking out after revealing the union had settled a six figure out-of-court compensation claim for a member who suffered a stress-related psychiatric injury after the employer failed to act on a series of warnings about excessive workloads. EIS general secretary Ronnie Smith commented: 'The fact that this record compensation award arose from a workload related case, which was compounded by a lack of management support, is no coincidence. This clearly illustrates just how serious such injuries can be, and the heavy price that employers will have to pay if they fail in their obligations to protect their staff.'

He added: 'Employers should be using the Health and Safety Executive's Stress Management Standards and trying to reduce and control the levels of stress caused by work activities. Stress-related illnesses are extremely serious and can take a huge toll on the individual concerned. The long-term effects can be significant, and recovery can take a long period of time. While the EIS supports members in stress-related claims, our preference would always be for such cases to be avoided completely.'

### **2. Workers 'still face abuse in the office'**

Holyrood and Westminster must work together to protect workers in Scotland from abuse and exploitation by bosses, Citizens Advice has said.

They reveal that in the last two years, advisers in Scottish citizens' advice bureaux have dealt with 107,000 clients who allege that they have been treated unfairly at work, but fear that this may be just the tip of the iceberg.

CAS head of policy Susan McPhee said: "The cases we see are bad enough, but we get a sense from

talking to these clients that there are many more people out there who are suffering these problems but are too scared to come forward, because they fear they will lose their job. To address the problem longer term, we call today for a Fair Employment Commission with powers to identify wrongdoing and to punish employers who flout the law and exploit their staff."

Many of those who suffer ill-treatment at work are low-paid and low-skilled workers, CAS said, with many unaware of their rights, leaving them "vulnerable to unfair treatment by rogue employers."

"Examples include illegal changes to contracts, unfair dismissal, low pay, withheld wages and victimisation of those who have tried to demand their rights."

### **3. Scottish stress epidemic**

A head teacher who was signed off work for nearly three years with stress is among dozens of education staff who have been on long-term leave from Scotland's schools due to mental health problems.

Figures obtained by *Scotland on Sunday* show thousands of working days lost across the country in the past year to stress, depression, anxiety and mental fatigue.

At one Aberdeenshire school, records show the head was signed off for 981 calendar days with stress before returning to work.

Edinburgh City Council, one of the country's largest education authorities, said the equivalent of 79 months had been lost in the last year alone through teacher stress, depression and other mental health issues.

In Fife, education bosses said stress accounted for 95 long-term absences in 2011, more than a host of other illnesses combined.

In Renfrewshire, a total of 51 teachers were signed off on long-term sick leave, defined as being more than 28 days, with psychological problems including stress, anxiety, depression and chronic fatigue, including one primary school teacher who was absent from June 2009 until the start of this month.

### ***Insecurity and uncertainty....***

Psychologists said uncertainties surrounding job security and the introduction of Scotland's new teaching framework, Curriculum for Excellence, had added to teachers' stress levels.

Dr Cynthia McVey, a psychologist at Glasgow Caledonian University, who specialises in stress, said: "Control is a big factor in stress and teachers seem to have very limited resources in disciplining children – the days when you could give a child a row have gone to some extent in some schools. "Curriculum for Excellence has also caused problems as I believe some teachers may not agree with the changes and, again, that is stressful."

Last month, it emerged a teacher had received a six-figure payout- the largest amount of compensation one of its members had ever received for the effects of occupational stress - after her employer's failure to lighten an excess of work led to a "stress-related psychiatric injury".

Ann Ballinger, general secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association, said the job had become more stressful since the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence and a new deal which sees supply teachers paid just £78 a day before tax. She said: "It's much more difficult to get supply teachers as people are not prepared to work for 40 per cent of their previous salary and there is not the same money available to pay for supply.

### ***The management view...***

A spokeswoman for Edinburgh City Council said: "We regularly consult with teachers to discuss and resolve concerns and provide a confidential counselling service for those needing extra support."

Maria Walker, Aberdeenshire Council's director of education, said: "Whatever the circumstances, managers are expected to support staff to remain at work or assist them in returning to work. The council has a variety of ways to do this, including employee assistance and occupational health providers."

### ***NETWORK COMMENT...***

We recorded in the last Newsletter some concerns about the emerging 'wellbeing' agenda and ways in which it could be deployed against staff or to shift focus from an employer's duty of care and responsibilities under the law to employees. Following a meeting at 2011 Hazards conference, we recommended that:

1. The essential emphasis should be on welfare rather than wellbeing
2. That the wellbeing agenda should be focussed upon the needs and priorities of employees rather than those of management
3. 'Wellbeing' would be more acceptable if re-branded as 'Stress Prevention'

These conclusions seem extremely pertinent to the emerging picture in Scotland, as described above.

## **ILO workplace stress prevention checkpoints**

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has produced a manual of 'easy-to-apply checkpoints for identifying stressors in working life and mitigating their harmful effects.' According to ILO: 'The negative impacts of stress are multiform and can include circulatory and gastrointestinal diseases as well as physical, psychosomatic and psycho-social problems. These in turn can lead to poor work performance, high accident and injury rates, and low productivity.' The global labour standards body says because of this it is 'vital' that employers 'optimise work conditions and organisation.' The manual, entitled [Stress Prevention at Work Checkpoints: Practical improvements for stress prevention in the workplace](#) was published in January and produced with guidance from experts including TUC's head of safety Hugh Robertson. It is promoted as being 'especially useful for companies and organisations that wish to incorporate stress prevention into their overall occupational safety and health policy and management systems.' Robertson says the document does not provide detailed direction on the organisational change required to effectively deal with stress at work, 'but what it does propose is extremely practical and sensible' and could be useful to union reps.

### **Strain on NHS takes its toll on staff**

The government's handling of the health service is leaving staff facing soaring stress levels, the union UNISON has said. The union was commenting on the publication this week of the official NHS Staff Survey findings for 2011 - and warned its own research had revealed the problem could be considerably worse. 'The NHS staff survey reveals the increased levels of stress being heaped on

staff by a combination of government cuts, the Health and Social Care Bill and the continuing pay freeze,' said Christina McAnea, UNISON head of health. 'The staff survey reflects some of the pressures felt by staff, but our own survey painted a much bleaker picture. UNISON's survey showed that 85 per cent experienced an increase in workload and 83 per cent suffered an increase in stress over the past year. The increase in workload is not a coincidence; it is down to cuts in staffing and to a lack of cover for staff on sick or on leave. And it is not just staff who suffer - the increase in workload and stress is felt by patients and by workers' families.' Patient frustration could be directed at staff, the union believed. 'Violence and harassment should have no place in our NHS and it is a disgrace that nurses, paramedics and other NHS staff should be threatened going about their work trying to help the sick and injured. It is time that a clear message was sent to those members of the public that attack NHS workers, they will be prosecuted and if found guilty they should receive tough sentences.' (Source: UNISON news release)

### **Hazards 2012 Conference, Keele University, 31 August-2 September**

This year's Hazards Campaign conference - the largest annual grassroots safety conference in the Northern Hemisphere - will take place from 31 August to 2 September 2012 at Keele University, Stoke-on-Trent.

In a year during which workplace health and safety has come in for unprecedented negative attention from the highest levels of government, the conference theme will be 'Countering the attack on the safe workplace.' In addition to top speakers, delegates will have a choice of 19 workshops on issues ranging from campaigning with members to dealing with employers and other risks, mapping, organising and 'finding out about health and safety issues.'

The [Hazards Campaign](#) is urging supporters to endeavour to persuade their union, at every level, 'to sponsor the conference to keep down costs and support the Hazards Campaigning all year round'.

### **News in Brief...**

#### ***New TUC workplace manual***

The TUC has produced a manual to provide practical advice for trade union workplace representatives on issues they are likely to encounter in dealing with a range of issues that can arise in the workplace. Find out more at:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/publications/viewPublication.cfm?frmPubID=641>

#### ***21 hours: why a shorter working week can help us all to flourish in the 21st century***

A recent report from the National Economics Foundation (NEF) argues that we need a shorter working week to become the norm, down from 40 hours or more, to 21 hours. According to the report, this should be the standard that is generally expected by government, employers, trade unions and employees.

NEF argues that a 'normal' working week of 21 hours could help to address a range of urgent, interlinked problems: overwork, unemployment, over-consumption, high carbon emissions, low well-being, entrenched inequalities, lack of time to live sustainably and to care for each other, and lack of leisure time. For further information visit the **NEF website** and see the article in Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion E-Briefing, 16 January 2012.

#### ***New Research into the impact of a recession on employees - Research conducted by Ulster and Nottingham Universities***

Researchers at the Universities of Nottingham and Ulster, in a study of civil servants in Northern Ireland, revealed that there is a significant rise in the number of workers that suffered from work stress during an economic downturn; the report also found the number of employees taking time off due to job stress increased during tough economic times.

### **NETWORK COMMENT....**

The Network through its events and publications is campaigning around developing issues in this field. We created and explored very many links and case studies during our 2011 Conference: "From Recession to Depression?"

### Now for (some) good news...

#### ***Attack on facility time defeated***

MPs have rejected a bid by the Hereford and South Herefordshire Conservative backbencher Jesse Norman to make trade unions pay for the hours their officials spend working for a union when they are supposed to be working for an employer.

Norman argued that the taxpayer should not be funding union activity in the public sector and that more money should instead be spent on frontline services.

Labour MP John Healey spoke against the bill, arguing that union representatives improved workplace health and safety, helped negotiate pay deals and ultimately saved the state money. The Bill was defeated by 211 votes to 132.

#### **Reviewing Lofstedt: what now for health and safety at work?**

Vaughan Skirrey, Network Deputy Coordinator, writes...

I represented the Network at the above Conference, organised by the Institute of Employment Rights, in London on 9<sup>th</sup> May. Our readers are doubtless familiar with the history of the commission, headed by Professor Ragnar Lofstedt, whose remit was to review the so-called 'burden' on business of health and safety legislation. Following the publication of Lofstedt's findings, the IER had commented that the Review had not in fact supported the coalition government's view that much health and safety legislation was in fact trussing up business activity in red tape and thus preventing that 'growth' which still remains elusive. Rather, "...it largely endorses the current regulatory framework for health and safety and consequently does not appear to represent an explicit attempt to weaken its foundations" (IER conference publicity leaflet).

#### ***It needed a Paxman or a Dimbleby....***

There is of course some difference between "endorsing" and "not attempting to weaken", and this was highlighted by conference speakers who showed varying levels of support and scepticism about Lofstedt. However, it seemed to me that the traditional format of IER events – a series of speakers, coming and going throughout the day – did not work well here. The keynote speaker was

Lofstedt himself, giving an account of his work which was unashamedly broad-brush and linked to "big picture" issues. After fielding a few questions, he was off to the next meeting, leaving other speakers from trade union and occupational health backgrounds to pick over the bones of what his Review didn't say, could have said and should have said. While this was interesting, it seemed essentially a familiar practice of preaching to the converted. The appearance in mid-afternoon of Andrew Miller MP, a member of Lofstedt's advisory panel, hardly enlivened the proceedings: he was heard in more or less - though possibly undeserved - polite silence. I reflected that a debating or 'Question Time' format would have worked much better for this event, giving opportunity for genuine argument and dialogue, which wasn't really there on the day. However, my impression of Professor Lofstedt did not persuade me that he would have agreed to take part in debate. He did invite delegates to address specific concerns to him via e mail, however. He suggested that current feedback on the report was mainly "positive but not perfect" and revealed that right wing politicians "are rather upset with me". The big contradiction between the Review's conclusion that H & S law is not in fact restricting business growth, and David Cameron's remarks to the London 'Evening Standard' drew no more than a diplomatic aside from Lofstedt – in debate, this could have been much more rigorously pursued.

#### ***Lofstedt has left the building...***

There were key observations from subsequent speakers which, of course, were neutralised since the main man had long departed. Professor Andrew Watterson identified a missing occupational health perspective – Lofstedt seemed to be about "all safety and not much health" – which will have resonance with Network members. And I'm sure delegates – very few in number, incidentally - would have been interested to hear a response from Lofstedt to David Whyte's charge that the review seemed, in retrospect, "extraordinarily naive". Perhaps he'll get an e mail...

Papers from this conference will be available to read in full on the IER website – [www.ier.org.uk](http://www.ier.org.uk)

### The Network at Westminster

We have secured an invitation to address the All-Party Parliamentary Health and Safety Group at the House of Commons on July 4<sup>th</sup> this year. This is a welcome opportunity to speak directly to elected members on the key issues around work stress. The Group has twenty qualifying members: five Conservative and five Liberal Democrats make up the Government party, with a further ten from the main Opposition party.

Ideally, we would be able to address the Group at length on all of our key campaigning issues, not least:

- Levels of sickness absence related to stress and associated symptoms continue to rise
- We continue to encounter a real lack of knowledge and understanding of stress related illness on the part of employers, managers – and, indeed, among workers themselves.
- The Black Report and the “Well Being” agendas widely promoted by employers – treating the symptoms and not attacking the causes?
- The economic downturn and austerity measures and their effect on the health and well being of our UK workforce
- The HSE Stress Management Standards – still there...somewhere; not actively promoted or publicised
- The “Monster of Health and Safety” agenda, actively promoted by the Prime Minister himself and other senior Government figures, and supported by their toadies among the red-top media

However, as is usual in these situations, we will have a very short “window” through which to address the Group.

Our representatives, Ian Draper and Les Roberts, are working hard on preparing some powerful messages for their address. We hope to be able to report back on this in the next Newsletter.

### Charity targets politicians to encourage better stress management

The National Institute for Clinical Research into Stress is offering parliamentarians in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland access to

self-test kits, so they can monitor their stress levels.

The charity points out that stress can be positive and healthy to well-being, but emphasises that long-term “slow-stress” is commonly understood to be unhealthy and the cause of major physical health issues, such as strokes and heart issues. It can also lead to the depression-like condition, post-slow-stress-fatigue, if it is not identified and countered.

For the next 12 months, the Institute is offering stress-measurement kits as part of an individualised programme, whereby parliamentarians can self-test themselves in their work situation. The results and analysis provided can then be delivered to the individual by their own trusted GP. This approach is designed to ensure that health checks are kept discreet. The programme is also open to Parliamentary workers. The Institute’s honorary director, Tadhg Ó Séaghdha, commented: “With this innovative system we offer health professionals a unique way of better identifying and quantifying harmful excess-stress and slow-stress in their patients, and I see no better way of helping encourage better job-stress management within our country’s government.” Ó Séaghdha continued: “The system is designed to be easily and widely used, with the objective of improving well-being – a key objective of our charity.”

According to HSE statistics, highlighted by the charity, people affected by symptoms that indicate excess-stress or post-slow-stress fatigue are absent from work for an average of 27 days a year.

*Source: IOSH Safety & Health Practitioner*

### NETWORK COMMENT

We can but hope that some members of the All Party Parliamentary Health & Safety Group will have received and made use of their stress measurement kits before July 4<sup>th</sup>!!



**Stress Network Annual Conference 2012**  
**Hard Times, Great Expectations and Victorian Values –**  
**combatting workplace stress in hostile times**

**Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, Nr Birmingham B45 8RS**

**Friday November 23<sup>rd</sup> 7.30 p.m.; Saturday, November 24<sup>th</sup> 9.45 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.**  
**and Sunday, November 25<sup>th</sup> 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. 2012**

*This conference is aimed at Health & Safety Representatives, Health & Safety and Human Resources Specialists, Stress Management Consultants and Trades Union Officials and Shop Stewards*

**Government attacks on health and safety put workers at greater risk**

When Charles Dickens was writing, working people led grim lives at the mercy of rapacious employers in often unhealthy and dangerous conditions. Many employers considered the daily sacrifice of the lives of workers the unavoidable and acceptable price of economic growth, attacking any attempt to legislate for better working conditions as a 'burden on businesses'. Thank goodness those days are gone, thanks to the campaigning of workers themselves and the introduction down the years of health and safety legislation. However, the attitudes that led to such conditions are far from dead – indeed they are very much alive just now.

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**FRIDAY EVENING – Informal drinks reception, meeting the Stress Network Team and Networking**

**SATURDAY MORNING – panel of speakers with Q&A session to follow**

- **Ralph Fevre**, Cardiff University – *Insight report on Ill Treatment at work* [confirmed]
- **David Price**, HSE Inspector – *Stress under the reduced HSE* [pending confirmation]
- **Mike Bosman**, PCS - *Mental Health issues in the Workplace* [confirmed]
- **Vaughan Skirrey and Bob Woods UKWSN** – *Trade Union Stewards and their own stressors*
- **Rachael Pope** UKWSN – *Negative Behaviours and aggression in the workplace*

**SATURDAY AFTERNOON & SUNDAY MORNING** Workshop Sessions

*With an overnight stay in pleasant, comfortable rural surroundings to the SW of Birmingham, it is hoped that this weekend event will provide a wide range of networking opportunities for delegates.*

**Don't delay – Book NOW to avoid disappointment and benefit from discounted delegate fees.**

**FINAL CLOSING DATE – Friday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2012**

## UK National Work-Stress Network

<b>PLEASE COMPLETE A SEPARATE FORM FOR EACH DELEGATE AND STAPLE TOGETHER IF NECESSARY.                  PHOTOCOPIES ARE ACCEPTABLE <span style="color: red;">PLEASE TYPE OR WRITE VERY CLEARLY</span></b>			
<b>NAME (BLOCK CAPITALS)</b>			
<b>CONTACT ADDRESS (BLOCK CAPITALS)</b>		<b>Postcode</b>	
<b>TELEPHONE No</b>		<b>MOBILE No</b>	
<b>EMAIL <span style="color: red;">Block Caps please</span></b>			
<b>ORGANISATION/UNION</b>			
<b>SPECIAL NEEDS (Use separate sheet if necessary)</b>	<b>Dietary</b>		
	<b>Access etc</b>		
<b>DAY DELEGATE (per person)</b>			
<b>One day (Sat): £115.00 (Unwaged delegate or non delegate carer: £60)*</b> (For B&B on Friday add £50 to above prices)			£
<b>Two days (Sat &amp; Sun): £135.00 (Unwaged delegate or non-delegate carer: £70) *</b> (Fee includes buffet lunch plus coffees on Saturday and coffees and packed lunch on Sunday)			
<b>RESIDENTIAL DELEGATE (per person)</b>			
<b>Two days (including Sat B&amp;B): £215 (Unwaged delegate or non-delegate carer:£90)*</b> <b>TWO DAYS (INCLUDING FRIDAY &amp; SATURDAY B&amp;B):</b> <b>£275 (UNWAGED DELEGATE OR NON-DELEGATE CARER: £140)*</b>			£
(Fee includes bed & breakfast as booked plus coffees etc, lunch and dinner on Saturday and coffee and packed lunch on Sunday)			
* Please note that there are no twin/double ground floor rooms in the Conference Centre. Delegates with mobility needs who wish to share a room with a carer will be accommodated for bed and breakfast in a nearby Premier Inn at an additional cost of £15 per person per night.			£
<b>Please write total supplement here:</b>			
<b>SUB TOTAL</b>			£
<b>Less Early Bird discount of 10% (Applies only to bookings and full payment received by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2012.)</b>			- £
<b>FULL TOTAL</b>			<b>£</b>

Complete this section only if you wish to share a room		
Name of person with whom you are sharing.		
Type of room (✓)	<b>TWIN</b>	<b>DOUBLE</b>
Is this person a delegate? (✓)		
Is this person a designated Carer? (✓)		

**CANCELLATIONS POLICY:** UP TO AND INCLUDING THE EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT CLOSING DATE, FULL REFUNDS [LESS AN ADMINISTRATIVE FEE OF £10] MAY BE MADE. AFTER THAT DATE A 75% REFUND ONLY MAY BE MADE UNLESS A CANCELLED PLACE IS FULLY FILLED BY A NEW OR SUBSTITUTE APPLICATION.

**No refunds will be made once numbers are confirmed with Conference Centre by November 5<sup>th</sup>**

COMPLETED APPLICATION FORMS SHOULD BE SENT TOGETHER WITH CHEQUE(S)

PAYABLE TO **UK NATIONAL WORK-STRESS NETWORK** TO:-

LES ROBERTS, CONFERENCE SECRETARY, 33 OLD STREET, UPTON UPON SEVERN, WORCS, WR8 0HN

EMAIL ADDRESS: [UKWORKSTRESS@LIVE.CO.UK](mailto:UKWORKSTRESS@LIVE.CO.UK)