

**INSIDE: Travelling workers • Actavo strike • Dust dangers**

Spring 2022 The magazine for construction sector members

# buildingWORKER



## Unite construction: Jobs, Pay and Conditions



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Getty Images

**A look at the dangers of dust encountered on many sites.**

Front cover picture: Mark Thomas



Workers across the UK are being squeezed by the cost of living crisis and construction workers are no exception.

With food prices growing, fuel costs climbing, interest rates rising and energy bills going through the roof, increasing pay rates to protect our members is Unite's number one priority in the coming months.

In order to secure decent pay for construction workers our industrial agreements, be it the CIJC, JIB or NAECI, must have pay rates which accurately reflect the work undertaken and increasing costs.

It is equally essential that Unite continues to increase and expand its influence and organisation across construction sites, to ensure more workers are protected from dubious employers and the correct rates are in place. To secure a fair wage, workers not only need a decent basic pay rate but they also need overtime rates to be properly applied and travel and lodge allowances paid in full.

Too often, even on major sites, workers find themselves being underpaid and not receiving all the money they are entitled to. It is why our members employed by Actavo (page 18), on the British Steel site in Scunthorpe, are true heroes in their fight to ensure they are paid in line with the NAECI agreement. Their stand has sent shockwaves through the sector, ensuring other employers now pay the correct rate. We all owe them a debt of gratitude.

Being paid everything you are entitled to is essential for all workers but especially for travelling workers who are reliant on these extra payments, to make the sacrifice of being away from family and friends financially worthwhile.

With Hinkley Point set to increase its workforce in the next 12 months, work increasing on HS2 and hopefully the new nuclear power station at Sizewell having a firm start date (page 5) construction's need for travelling workers will grow.

The feature in *buildingWORKER* (page 14) examines the challenges and benefits of construction workers working away from home and gives an insight into their life away from home.

Construction is a safety critical industry, we know that the safest workers are those who work on union recognised sites, with union appointed safety reps and who can raise safety concerns without victimisation.

For all construction workers, the advice and information contained on page 10 about the potential dangers of breathing in deadly substances at work is essential reading.

If you have any concerns about your personal safety you should contact your rep or regional officer immediately. Your safety is paramount.

Gail Cartmail, executive head of operations

# Construction workers seeking pay rise

Construction unions led by Unite have submitted a pay claim to the Construction Industry Joint Council (CIJC), seeking a 10 per cent increase in pay, in order to tackle the cost of living crisis and redress recent pay freezes and below inflation increases.

The CIJC is the largest of the construction agreements and it primarily covers civil engineering and the biblical trades (bricklayers, carpenters and painters). The pay and conditions of around 500,000 construction workers are influenced by the agreement.

Unite is seeking a uniform pay increase for all workers covered by the agreement from labourers to craftworkers.

Unite is also seeking an increase in both sick pay and holiday entitlement to put the CIJC in line with other construction agreements.



Mark Thomas

**Unite is working to secure a fair pay rise for construction workers**

In addition Unite national officer **Jerry Swain** has secured agreement on a new joint secretary's guidance for the CIJC agreement.

The guidance details what measures employers should take to provide access for union officers on construction sites.

It states that union officials will be given access to workers in welfare facilities including site canteens and that they will be able to meet and speak to workers during rest and break periods.

The agreement is significant as several employers have denied Unite access.

Negotiations will be held during the spring, the anniversary date when the pay rates come into effect is the end of June.

Unite general secretary **Sharon Graham** said: "Construction workers are highly skilled and are essential to the UK's future prosperity. But they are fed up with years of wage attacks. So with growth across the sector now forecast, we're simply asking that our members get their fair share of rewards."

# Unite secures compensation for Carillion workers

Following a marathon legal case, Unite has finally secured some financial compensation for workers who lost their jobs without warning when the construction and outsourcing company Carillion collapsed in January 2018.

In total Unite secured compensation for 246 workers due to Carillion's failure to inform and consult its workers before its collapse.

The settlement is worth around £1,166 per worker, for a total settlement of £286,765.

However, as Carillion is in compulsory liquidation, the payments will be

capped at £544 per week and they will be paid from the government's Redundancy Payments Office.

The workers may receive some of the additional amount they are owed, which is treated as an unsecured creditor, if the official receiver is successful with their ongoing legal claim against Carillion's auditors KPMG. The claim is for £1.3 billion, due to KPMG's alleged failing in its auditing of Carillion's accounts.

Unite had already secured a significant victory in July 2021 at the Employment Appeals Tribunal when it overturned an attempt by

**Carillion being in compulsory liquidation made securing compensation for workers more challenging**



Getty Images

the Official Receiver to rule out the protected award for 'special circumstances'.

The special circumstances being the failure of lenders and the government to provide it with funds to continue trading. This argument was rejected.

## Sizewell needs more support

Unite has called for the government to remove the handbrake and to fully commit to building a new nuclear power station at Sizewell in Suffolk.

In late January the government announced that it was providing £100 million worth of funding to the energy company EDF to help finance the development of the project and attract other investors.

If the project is given the go ahead then it will create tens of thousands of construction jobs. It will take around a decade to complete the building project.

Unite is becoming increasingly concerned that any further delay by the government on the final go ahead for Sizewell will be disastrous. There is a growing fear that the skills

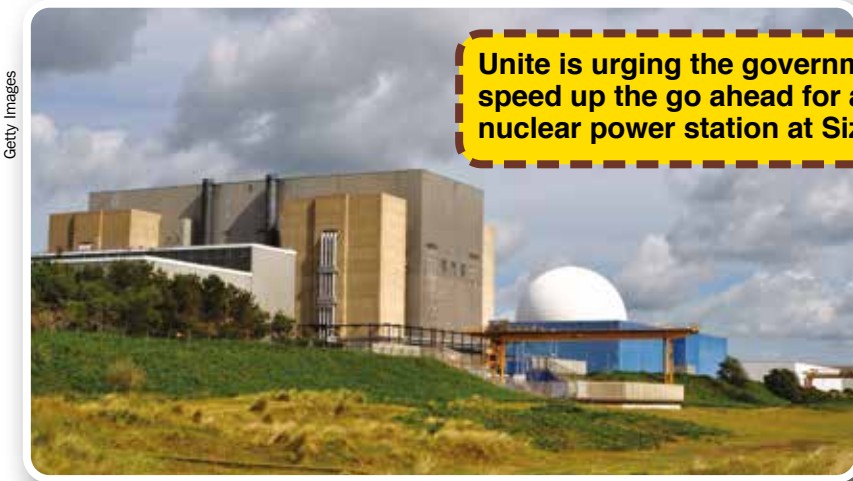
developed by nuclear construction workers building the new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point will be lost if there is not a swift decision to give the project the go ahead. This will further delay the project and increase costs.

Unite general secretary **Sharon Graham** said: “The government needs to take the handbrake off when it comes to the development of new nuclear power stations. The government needs to agree a funding model that allows Sizewell to start without any further delay.

If such a funding model requires government support, then it should be given.”

■ *The challenge of working away from home page 14*

**Unite is urging the government to speed up the go ahead for a new nuclear power station at Sizewell**



Getty Images

## Unite revitalises blacklisting collusion inquiry

Unite has announced a revitalised inquiry to search for information if any Unite or its predecessor unions’ officials colluded in blacklisting workers.

A previous commitment for such an inquiry was not completed and general secretary **Sharon Graham** announced the new inquiry in her first 100 days in office.

The industrial scale of the blacklisting of construction workers was exposed in 2009 when the Information Commissioners Office raided the premises of the Consulting Association the secretive organisation who

organised the blacklisting on behalf of the majority of the major construction companies.

Following the discovery of the blacklisting Unite led the fight for justice and has secured £21.24 million of compensation for blacklisted workers. The union is currently actively taking legal cases on behalf of workers who believe they were blacklisted on the Crossrail project.

Despite the work of Unite, there have long been concerns that some union officials may have colluded with the blacklisting of workers.

A panel of lay members who have experienced blacklisting will oversee the gathering of evidence into the inquiry which will be undertaken by an independent QC led inquiry.

The panel will comprise **Dave Smith** chair of the Blacklist Support Group and Unite executive council members **Frank Morris** and **Tony Seaman**.

Unite general secretary, **Sharon Graham** said: “It is very important that blacklisted workers and their families can have total confidence in this inquiry. I said we would do it and that no stone would be left unturned.”

# Builders donate to food bank

A large number of sites and construction branches donated to their local food banks in the run-up to Christmas.

This included the workers at Hinkley Point C in Somerset who donated £200 worth of food and other essentials to the local food bank in Bridgwater.

The workers decided to make the donation in November as they felt this was more beneficial as the food bank receives increased donations immediately prior to Christmas.

The donation included tins of tuna, corn beef and rice pudding as well as shower gels, as these were the items the food bank identified as most needed.



**LEFT TO RIGHT: Steven Davies (Unite Learning Rep - Kier BAM), two volunteers from the food bank and Richard Lees (Unite Safety Rep - Bylor)**

The use of food banks has been rocketing with people in work increasingly having to make use of them due to the cost of living crisis with the retail price index (RPI) inflation rate hitting over 7 per cent in December and often outstripping

wage increase. The situation is made worse by booming energy prices and the government's tax increase scheduled for April.

To make the situation even worse, the government cut the £20 uplift in universal credit last autumn which has forced many families, again including many who are in work, from a position where they could keep their heads above water to no longer being able to cope.

# Battersea Apprentices Tooled Up



**Unite apprentices receive their tool boxes. LEFT TO RIGHT: Mo, Unite apprentice, Declan Murphy, Unite convenor, Solome, Unite apprentice**

During the autumn Unite's construction officers and activists were busy recruiting new apprentices into the union.

This included apprentices on the massive Battersea Power station project in South London. On phase three of the development Unite convenor **Declan Murphy** has recruited seven new apprentices into Unite. Each of the new recruits received a fully stocked toolbox after joining the union.

Unite has always recognised that by recruiting construction apprentices at a vastly reduced rate, the young workers are protected through their training and they also get to understand the importance of being in and protected by Unite throughout their working lives.

## Unite secures victory for dismissed workers

Unite has secured financial compensation for workers employed by Focus (MDC) in Whitehaven Cumbria who were dismissed without warning in July 2019, when the company went into liquidation.

The 73 former employees of Focus who were members of Unite, were employed as scaffolders and joiners at Sellafield. They will now receive a 90 day protective award, as the company failed in its legal duty to consult the workers prior to dismissing them.

Each of the workers can expect to receive a payment in the region of a

couple of thousand pounds in financial compensation following their dismissal.

Unite regional officer **Ryan Armstrong** said: "This is a classic case of the benefits of being a member of a trade union in tough times. Standing collectively, we can reach awards and settlements that would be immensely difficult for individuals to achieve by themselves.

"Our members at Focus (MDC) were treated in a shabby way by the management and we are pleased that this has been rightly recognised by an employment tribunal."



Getty Images

**Workers based at Sellafield have won compensation following the collapse of their employer**

## Construction workers climb for mental health

Construction members of Unite are joining together to highlight the issue of mental health issues in construction and to raise money for a good cause.

The construction workers have decided to climb Mount Snowdon and to raise money for the construction mental health charity Mates in Mind while doing so.

Construction has some of the highest levels of suicide of any sector in the UK. It is only in recent years that some employers have begun to recognise the mental health challenges that the industry faces, which is linked to large numbers of operatives working away

from home, long hours, insecure work, poor and aggressive management practices and variable rates of pay.

An increasing number of Unite activists have received mental health training in some form and are playing a critical role in helping colleagues who are experiencing mental health issues.

The walkers will be meeting at the Snowdonia Ranger car park (postcode LL54 7YS) on Saturday 20 August at 08:30 and will begin walking at 09:00. They will follow the easier Ranger path, which is still a challenge and takes around six hours in total to complete (with stops along the way promised).

For more information contact the walks organisers [Stuart.grice@unitetheunion.org](mailto:Stuart.grice@unitetheunion.org) or [Darren.burrows@citybuildingglasgow.co.uk](mailto:Darren.burrows@citybuildingglasgow.co.uk)

Or if you just want to donate you can do so at the following Just giving page <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/stuart-grice1>

## Oregon Timber workers receive pay increase

Unite members employed by Oregon Timber, which is part of the Barratt Group and based in Selkirk in Scotland, have secured a 10 per cent pay increase for 2022.

The 80 plus workforce produce timber frame buildings.

The pay agreement was negotiated by regional officer **Willie Thomson** and means that the workforce have received a total of a 13 per cent pay increase in the last 12 months.

Willie Thomson said: "These are highly skilled workers and this pay rise was fully deserved. Unite will be using this pay increase to further increase our membership at Oregon Timber and the union will be looking to further build on this increase in future pay negotiations."



Getty Images

**Unite construction members will climb every mountain, starting with Snowdon to raise money for mental health charities**

# PAY AND BARGAINING

## Red Book Workers seek pay increase

Local government construction workers who are covered by the Red Book agreement are balloting for industrial action over pay.

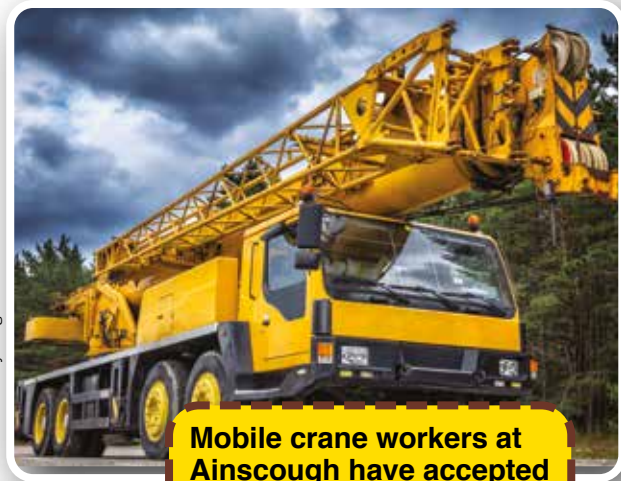
The workers overwhelmingly rejected a 1.75 per cent pay offer for 2021. The figure was well below the rate of inflation and amounted to a real terms pay cut.

The workers have endured a decade of pay freezes and below inflation pay freezes which has resulted in their pay declining by over 20 per cent in real terms.

## Mobile crane drivers see pay rates rise

Crane drivers employed by Ainscough cranes have accepted a two year pay increase following a ballot of members.

The workers who operate the mobile cranes accepted a three per cent increase on rates from October 2021 with an increase on meal allowance, weekend stand down, mileage allowance and an additional day's holiday. There will then be a four per cent pay increase and four per cent increase on allowances from October 2022."



Mobile crane workers at Ainscough have accepted a two year pay deal

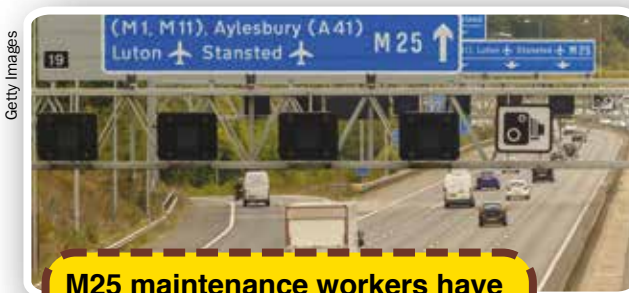
## Workers secure pay rise

Unite acting national officer for construction Chris Weldon has secured a pay increase for Environmental Engineers and Staff (BESA). The members of Unite accepted a 2.5 per cent increase for 2022 and a 2.5 per cent increase for 2023.

Meanwhile, workers at Hanson Cement have rejected a 4.5 per cent pay offer. As *buildingWORKER* went to press Unite was in the process of balloting the workers over the next steps in the dispute.

## Highway workers receive pay rise

Workers employed on the M25 highways maintenance contract have received a 5.6 per cent pay increase. The workers are employed by CPS (Connect Plus Services) a joint venture company comprising Balfour Beatty, Atkins and Egis Road Operations.



M25 maintenance workers have secured a healthy pay increase

The increase was part of a two year deal agreed by Malcolm Bonnett and which reversed a pay freeze the industry was experiencing.

The increase was higher than other highways maintenance contract in the South East.

Unite are currently seeking recognition on the A3 Highways Maintenance contract held by Kier and which covers the M3, M4 and M27.

## Irish Workers see pay increases

Construction workers in the Republic of Ireland saw pay rates increase in February.

The pay increase was negotiated with the government and comes in the form of a Construction Sectorial Employment Order (SEO).

The SEO, which is legal enforceable covers all construction workers with the exception of electricians, plumbers, pipefitters and associated welders who are covered by a separate mechanical SEO agreement.

The SEO means that construction workers saw their pay increase by 2.8 per cent from 1 February 2022, with pensions increasing by two per cent.

This is part of a two year deal which will see a further increase of 2.8 per cent and a two per cent increase in pensions from 1 February 2023.

- As *buildingWORKER* went to press there was a two day hearing scheduled in mid-February at the Labour Court to seek agreement on a pay increase for the construction workers covered by the Mechanical SEO.

## Progress for Qatar migrant workers but more action needed

On International Migrants Day last year (18 December), the BWI (the global federation of construction unions) and FIFPRO (the global federation of football players), issued an open letter, recognising the work of migrant workers, who have built the infrastructure for this year's football World Cup in Qatar.

The vast majority of the work on building the stadiums, facilities, accommodation and transport in Qatar has been undertaken by migrant

workers. It is also recognised that through union lobbying there has been some improvements to the conditions and working environment for migrant workers. In particular there has been significant improvements in their human rights.

However, both the BWI and FIFPRO acknowledge that more needs to be done to improve the rights and the welfare of migrant workers and that their situation must not be forgotten once the World Cup ends later this year.

In order to ensure further improvements for migrant workers both organisations are calling for the: complete abolition of the kafala system, the establishment of a migrant workers centre, and the introduction of fundamental rights for workers.

Meanwhile the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the government of Qatar have published a new report on health and safety provisions for workers in the country. The report has been welcomed for its level of openness and transparency.

## Support crucial to workers safety during Covid

A new report by the Australian union federation (ACTU) has found that providing proper support to workers is the most effective way of keeping them safe during the pandemic.

The report titled *Making Work Covid Safe*, identifies paid leave as being the most effective way of ensuring that sick workers don't attend workplaces.

The report's findings heed the similar experiences in the UK where the very low level of statutory sick pay (SSP) is a major factor in workers not self-isolating as they simply can't afford to.

The report also found that Covid safe practices such as ensuring sufficient ventilation and maintaining social distancing measures, access to rapid

testing in workplaces and a properly funded healthcare system, were also all important in maintaining worker health and keeping communities safe.



Getty Images

**Workers need financial support to protect them during Covid outbreaks**

## Covid hit migrant workers hardest

A new report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has found that migrant workers were hit hardest by the economic shock caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The report *Locked down and in Limbo* found that globally migrant workers had their employment suspended, terminated or they experienced a dramatic loss in income.

Some became stranded due to lockdowns and border closures while others were suddenly forced to return home.

The report recommends that migrant workers should be covered by the same health and safety laws as indigenous workers.

It further demands that migrant workers should not pay recruitment fees, or be charged for personal protective equipment, testing vaccinations or quarantine costs.

# Dangerous dust is a

Construction workers experience a high incidence of respiratory problems, and are continually exposed to dusts and specific dangerous materials such as asbestos and respirable crystalline silica (RCS). Tragically many unnecessary deaths and severe disabilities have occurred in this sector through diseases connected to these substances, such as mesothelioma, asbestosis, silicosis and cancer. Other prevalent respiratory diseases found among construction workers are chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and asthma.

Some key activities where exposures occur include:

- Refurbishment work
- Building maintenance
- Kerb/paving/block-cutting
- Stone masonry/stone floor laying
- Tunnelling/demolition

## Facts and Figures

There are 12,000 lung disease deaths each year estimated to be linked to past exposures at work. In addition there are estimated to be 17,000 new cases of self-reported breathing or lung problems caused or made worse by work. Including:

- Mesothelioma 2,400
- Asbestos-related lung cancer 2,400
- Lung cancer due to other agents 2,800
- COPD 4,000
- Other (pneumoconiosis and allergic alveolitis) 350

Cancers like mesothelioma and lung cancer are often rapidly fatal following the onset of symptoms, other diseases such as COPD and asthma may persist and progress over a period of many years.



Getty Images

## Cancer in construction

Dusts, chemicals and potentially harmful mixtures (e.g. paints) are common in construction work. Processes that emit dusts, fumes, vapours or gases into the air, are a significant cause of lung disease.

Occupational cancer is higher in construction than any other sector.

- Over 40 per cent of occupational cancer deaths and cancer registrations are in construction
- Past exposures annually cause over 5,000 occupational cancer cases and 3,700 deaths
- The most significant cause of these cancers are: asbestos 70 per cent, silica 17 per cent, diesel engine exhaust 6.5 per cent, others such as paint 6 per cent.

## Asbestos

Asbestos was widely used within homes and other buildings until 1999. It remains in great quantities in these places creating a risk to occupiers and construction workers. Types:

- Crocidolite (blue asbestos)
- Amosite (brown asbestos)
- Chrysotile (white asbestos)

Asbestos is a hidden killer, it was used as an insulator, fire protection and corrosion protector you may find it in many construction materials including: ceiling tiles, pipe insulation, roofs,

gutters, downpipes, boilers and sprayed coatings.

Fibres become airborne if you cut, drill or otherwise break asbestos during construction work or by working near damaged asbestos, resulting in breathing in fibres probably at high levels. Even small jobs done regularly can lead to illness, as the total number of these fibres is a factor in developing a life threatening disease. Asbestos disease include:

- **Mesothelioma** – a cancer of the lung lining, always fatal
- **Asbestos-related lung cancer** – almost always fatal.
- **Asbestosis** – Scarring of the lungs, not always fatal but very debilitating
- **Diffuse pleural thickening** – thickening of the membrane surrounding the lungs. This restricts lung expansion leading to breathlessness.

## Check list for Reps:

- Before the start of maintenance, refurbishment or demolition work, check: that employers have undertaken a risk assessment that sets out the appropriate controls <https://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/risk-assessments.htm>
- Owners or managers of non-domestic premises must keep and provide info on asbestos surveys that identify the location and condition of any asbestos

# killer in construction

■ Reps can check this has been done and request the information before work starts, to see where it is and its condition. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/managing/index.htm>

Unite Legal services offers advice and assistance around asbestos compensation claims. They also hold an asbestos register where members can enter details of asbestos exposure, helping with any potential future claims: <https://www.unitelegalservices.org/services/asbestos-compensation-claims>

## Silica

Silica exposure can cause potentially fatal cancers, lung and kidney diseases, and may lead to other chronic health problems. In general, the more you are exposed, the greater the risk. Silica is a natural substance found in most rocks, sand and clay.

You generate dust from these materials during many common construction tasks, such as cutting, grinding and drilling. Some of this dust is fine enough to get deep into your lungs, known as respirable crystalline silica (RCS) commonly called silica or silica dust. Silica is responsible for some very nasty diseases:

- Silicosis causes severe breathing problems and increases the risk of lung infections
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease COPD is a group of lung diseases including bronchitis and emphysema, resulting in severe breathlessness, prolonged coughing and disability. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/copd/index.htm>
- Lung and other cancers silica exposure is responsible for several hundred lung cancer deaths in the UK each year. It estimates males exposed to silica at the UK standard of 0.1 mg/m<sup>3</sup> have an increased lung cancer risk of 40 per cent.

<https://tinyurl.com/wr6fpzsj>

You don't need to inhale a great amount to cause severe illness.

## Check list for reps

- Ask if the material you are using, or dust from the work, contains silica
- Ask to see the risk assessments that includes all safe procedures and protective measures
- Ask what controls, are in place: Dust extraction, PPE including masks, cleaning

See Unite affiliated EFBWW document Reducing RCS Dust on Construction Sites <https://tinyurl.com/yckpaejy>

## Diesel Exhaust Fumes

Diesel engines exhaust emissions (DEEE's) contain many known carcinogenic substances. The main source of DEEEs on a site is from generators, heavy vehicles and plant.

The more significant risks are linked to longer periods of work with this equipment in enclosed spaces and situations where there is blue or black smoke.

## What reps should look out for:

- **Blue smoke** – which indicates a poorly serviced / tuned engine
- **Black smoke** – which indicates a mechanical fault with the engine
- **White smoke** – produced when the engine is started from cold.

Breathing DEEEs can cause a number of ill-health effects. Short-term exposure may cause eye or respiratory irritation. Longer exposure periods, can lead to coughing, chestiness and breathlessness and in some cases cancer.

Reps can use the following links to identify risks from DEES's, control measures and further action

- Control of diesel engine exhaust emissions in the workplace <https://tinyurl.com/uu8mum7t>
- Layout 1 ([unitetheunion.org](http://unitetheunion.org)) <https://tinyurl.com/yc36jrfw>
- Reps can report DEEE exposure happening at their sites using our Diesel Exhaust Can Kill Report It Campaign - Unite The Union <https://tinyurl.com/47drj6f2>



**Hundreds of construction workers die or have their health ruined following exposure to silica**

Getty Images

# CONSTR DUST DA

**Be safe, ask questions, don't risk your  
Speak to your Unite rep or officer**

**For more information:**

**ASBESTOS:** <https://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/risk-asses>

**SILICA:** <https://www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/occupational-di>

**DIESEL:** <https://www.unitetheunion.org/campaigns/dies>



# CONSTRUCTION DANGERS





health

[www.unitetheunion.org](http://www.unitetheunion.org)

[assessments.htm](#)

[disease/cancer/silica.htm](#)

[silica-can-kill-report-it/](#)

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# Like a Roll

Construction workers have always been migrant workers, not just in the traditional sense of working in another country as infamously portrayed in *Auf Wiedersehen Pet*. What is far more common is for construction workers, to work away from home in their own country, in reality means they too are migrant workers.

Tens of thousands of UK construction workers regularly work away from home. This can be because either there is no suitable work in the local area so travelling to secure paid employment becomes the only option or alternatively by working away from home they can secure much higher rates of pay.

Workers working away from home and covered by an industrial agreement such as the Construction Industry Joint Council (CIJC), Joint Industry Board (JIB) or the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI), are all entitled to a nightly lodge payment. The actual figures vary but they are all between £40-£45.

These lodging allowances are agreed with the HMRC, are untaxed and the worker does not have to provide a receipt.

All of the major construction agreements also pay some form of mileage allowance but the rules differ.

London, Essex and Grangemouth in Scotland.

During these times Chris worked either under the JIB or NAECI and he received lodge allowance to cover accommodation and food.

His experience of accommodation is mixed. At Grangemouth, it is set up for travelling workers and accommodation is directly provided.

This was in stark contrast to when he was working in London at the Natural History Museum, where he lived in various hotels in the Paddington area and which Chris describes as “not places where you would take your wife”.

One issue that Chris warns about: “is that you are a long way from home” if there is a family issue you need to deal with.

He also points out that returning home at weekends is not automatic, under the JIB agreement workers only receive an allowance to return home every fortnight, while under the NAECI agreement it is paid just 12 times a year.

He recalls that in order to maximise his time at home he once worked permanent nights and undertook a rota of 11 days on and three days off to secure an extra day at home.

Chris’ advice to workers contemplating working away from home is to “go into it with your eyes open”. In particular Chris identifies preserving your mental health as being a key issue. His experience is that travelling workers often experience greater mental health challenges than others. It is an issue that he thinks that Unite along with some more responsible employers is finally beginning to tackle.

**Over 60 per cent of workers at Hinkley Point live away from home**



Getty Images

Equally there is no one size fits all type of site or project that a travelling worker will work on. Some sites will be small, while there are a growing number of travelling workers on mega construction projects. Equally some engagements could be just for a few weeks while some workers remain on the same site for years. There are additional costs associated with working away from home such as the cost of accommodation, food and travel.

Construction workers not covered by an industrial agreement may have to provide receipts, might have accommodation provided by the employer or not receive any form of lodging payment.

Chris, an electrician based in the North East, has had to work away from home on three occasions when there was a lack of long-term work locally. He has undertaken spells away from home in

# ing Stone



**The Crossrail project in London attracted many travelling workers**

Gary a concrete finisher from North Yorkshire has worked in construction for 25 years, 15 of them away from home, for financial reasons.

He highlights the strong advantage of working PAYE under an industrial agreement when working away. As he received both lodge allowance and meal allowance when working in this manner.

He has also worked self-employed under the Construction Industry Scheme (CIS) scheme, where although his rate of pay was slightly higher and he paid less tax, he was still worse off as he had to pay for accommodation from his own pocket.

Gary urges workers to think carefully before choosing to work away from home. He says that loneliness is a big

problem and “that if you haven’t got a strong marriage it is not a good idea. You don’t want bad thoughts in your head.” He estimates that 60–70 per cent of contractors working away from home are divorced.

Gary believes that when working away workers will often undertake even longer hours than usual to combat loneliness and insecurity.

In terms of accommodation Gary says that if workers are on a longer-term job it is better to share accommodation with people you know especially if it provides access to cooking facilities otherwise “you are eating take outs every night”.

Another word of caution from Gary, is that while working away is often very

lucrative, workers need to be disciplined not to waste money. He cites the fact that problem gambling is a major issue for many construction workers and for those working away, there is an even greater temptation.

For Tommy a crane supervisor from Belfast, geography and the nature of his work means that he has worked away from home for the vast majority of his career.

That includes five years of working on various Crossrail station projects, in some less than brilliant digs. He recalls that he was desperate to find somewhere in East London and rented a room in Barking for three weeks “it was smaller than a prison cell and wasn’t clean”.

## TRAVELLING FOR WORK

Like Gary and Chris, Tommy cites the biggest issue is being away from your family for long periods.

Tommy's advice to workers considering working away from home is to do your research, find out how long a project will last, who the employer is and their reputation and also how close to the site you will be able to find accommodation.

Once starting on a project he advocates talking to other workers, who will be able to provide the best advice on where to stay longer-term.

Traditionally in the UK most travelling construction workers have inevitably been drawn to London, which is the epicentre of construction work and accounts for over 30 per cent of the UK's construction work.

While in general pay rates in London tend to be higher, accommodation, food and travel also tends to cost more.

However, currently the largest single site for construction workers is the new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point in Somerset where there are now in excess of 7,000 workers.

Due to its isolated nature between 60 to 70 per cent of the workforce are working away from home.

Having so many workers in a geographically remote area poses huge challenges.

The client EDF has attempted to resolve this challenge by providing its own accommodation. For £40 a night including breakfast and an evening meal, workers can stay in EDF's specially created accommodation, which Unite reps report is of a very high quality.

There are 1,800 of these EDF accommodation units split into two campuses. The campuses also have a canteen, gyms, shops and bars. However they are so popular that workers have to book them up to six weeks in advance to secure a room.

In addition to the accommodation provided by EDF many travelling workers share lodgings in the nearest town of Bridgwater, others live on various caravan sites and some stay further afield in Weston-Super-Mare or Taunton.

With even greater number of workers set to join the site there is an anxiety that saturation point has been reached and there are genuine concerns where workers will be able to secure lodgings.

Importantly the Hinkley Point site contains an extensive health centre staffed by doctors and nurses. Workers when feeling unwell can book an appointment and can receive prescriptions.

Without this service travelling workers would have to return home for medical treatment, which results in a loss of pay, or they ignore seeking treatment which

could result in conditions becoming more serious.

The way that EDF has provided its own accommodation and welfare facilities for travelling workers has set the bar for future projects and it is likely that workers who have experienced good conditions at Hinkley will be expecting to be treated in a similar manner on future projects.

The next similar project in the pipeline is the building of a new nuclear power station at Sizewell in Suffolk.

Unite reps at Hinkley think this will be an even greater challenge. Sizewell is even more geographically remote from major population centres than Hinkley, with Ipswich the closest major town and it is much further away than Bridgwater.

As Sizewell will require a similar sized workforce to Hinkley it could be that EDF will need to provide accommodation for 4,000 workers in order to fulfil the project.

With such mega projects in the pipeline the UK's need for travelling construction workers won't change, Unite's role is to ensure that these workers get everything they are entitled to and receive the best possible treatment and support.

**When the Sizewell project begins it will need a very large number of travelling workers**



# Lack of umbrella company crackdown leaves HMRC targeting workers



**Tens of thousands of construction workers are forced to work via umbrella companies**

The latest HMRC attempt to prevent contractors from being caught up in an umbrella tax avoidance scheme is an 'interactive risk checker' that workers put their details into.

The risk checker introduced late last year is quick to highlight that if a worker is in "a tax avoidance scheme you could end up with a large tax bill plus interest and penalties".

There is no acknowledgement that many umbrella companies are vehicles set up not only to deprive the government of taxes but workers of wages.

"The risk checker, as with other HRMC guidance on umbrella companies, fails to recognise that workers often have no choice but to agree to be paid through an umbrella company chosen by their employer if they want the job," explained Unite national officer for construction **Jerry Swain**: "They are in an impossible situation that will only be solved when umbrella companies are properly regulated or outlawed altogether."

Tens of thousands of construction workers are forced to work via umbrella companies. Under an umbrella company contract the worker does not receive the pay rate agreed

with an agency. Instead, from the workers' earnings the employer's national insurance contributions are deducted as well as the standard employee's national insurance contributions and income tax.

On top of this, workers often have their holiday pay rolled up into the rate, which means they have a weekly amount of holiday pay allocated as part of their pay and when they actually take annual leave they receive nothing.

If the worker agrees to pay into an auto-enrolment pension scheme, they again have to pay both the employer's and the employee's contributions. To add insult to injury the umbrella company then takes a further slice of the worker's pay, usually around £20 a week, for the privilege of being paid in this way.

In addition workers report being charged the apprenticeship levy and for indemnity insurance, both deductions should only ever be paid by the employer.

The reason that agencies force workers to be paid via umbrella companies is to avoid paying employer's national insurance contributions, holiday pay and pension contributions and effectively boosting their profits.

Labour MP Ruth Cadbury is a fierce critic of the government's lack of action in bringing umbrella companies to heel through regulation.

Speaking in the Commons about HRMC's online risk checker, she said: "The government has so far done nothing but publish some guidance.

"The 'Wild West' supply chain of unregulated companies continues to conspire to lure workers into tax avoidance schemes, often entirely unwittingly."

Cadbury added that without regulation "ongoing skimming of contractors' pay; misappropriating holiday pay and backhanders between agencies and umbrella companies' will continue.

"Action is needed to actually stop the schemes," Cadbury said.

■ As *buildingWORKER* went to press the government was consulting on umbrella companies, Unite tabled a response demanding swift action to resolve the misery that workers experience.

# Striking for a FAIR DAY'S PAY

The Scunthorpe scaffolders employed by Actavo are heroes, when speaking to them they were preparing to embark on their third sustained period of strike action in just over a year.

Due to the nature of construction, strikes are rare, and industrial action for such a long period is unprecedented.

The 60 scaffolders who work on the maintenance project at British Steel in Scunthorpe, looking after 500 pieces of scaffolding, aren't after huge riches, they simply want to be paid the rate for the job.

Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI). They are now paid up to 15 per cent below the NAECI rate.

The workers were increasingly angry about low pay, there was a growing realisation that all other scaffolding contractors on the site, were receiving the NAECI rate.

Matters came to a head when the previous contractor Brand Energy transferred around half a dozen workers onto the contract. These workers were receiving the NAECI rate plus a bonus.

The existing workers who were being paid less were expected to train them.

The scaffolders balloted for industrial action at the end of 2020 and secured a huge yes vote. On the day that the result was announced Brand Energy announced it had lost the maintenance contract to Actavo.

However, the scaffolders undertook substantial strike action in the early months of 2021 before they were TUPE transferred to Actavo.

Soon after the contract transferred, talks were held with Actavo about increasing pay to the NAECI rates.

It then became apparent Actavo didn't control its own destiny. As Dave Burchill says every time a proposal is put forward they are told "We have to take this to British Steel."

With talks making no progress the workers decided to ballot for fresh industrial action and having secured a further huge yes vote, strike action began on 4 October last year.

They remained continually on strike until Christmas Eve when the strike ended.

Dave and Dayne say that the initial weeks on strike were difficult, with the workers just picketing.

However, that changed when Unite's dispute unit got involved. Pressure was applied to Denis O'Brien, Actavo's largest shareholder, who is also Ireland's second richest man. Protests have been held at Leinster Rugby Club and Celtic Football Club as O'Brien is a significant shareholder of both.

There have also been protests at Actavo's other sites across the UK. It is understood that the dispute and the protests has cost Actavo around £500,000 in lost business.

Actavo isn't the only company that has been targeted. Several companies including scaffolding firm Altrad and Rope Access Trading Solutions (RATS) have been on the Scunthorpe site during the strike undertaking the work of Actavo workers. Both companies have been targeted with protests, with protesters joined by a large inflatable rat known as Scabby.

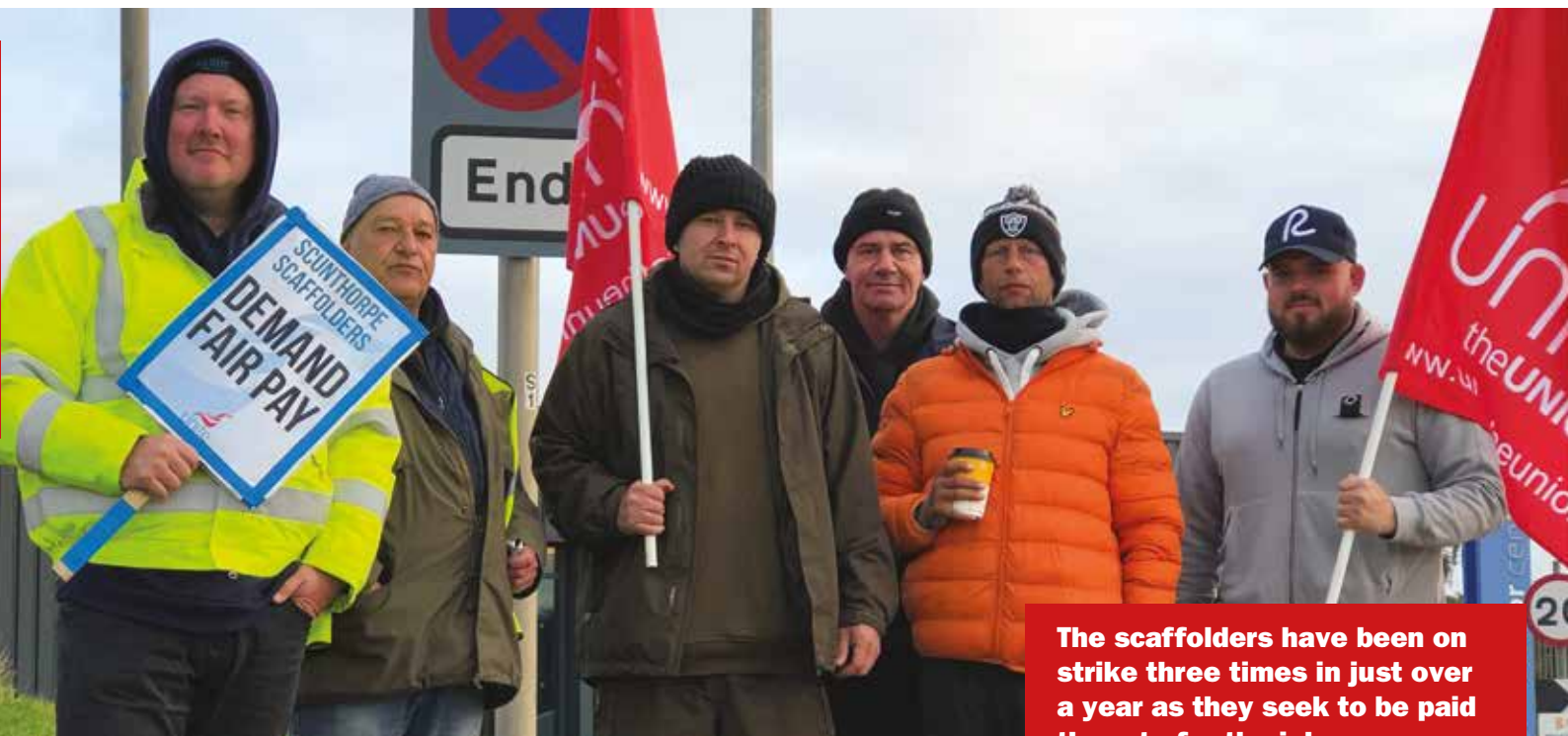
The scaffolders also note the visit to the picket line from Unite general secretary Sharon Graham in early December was a particular boost for morale.

**The campaign has targetted Denis O'Brien, Actavo's largest shareholder and Ireland's second richest man who has a stake in Lenister rugby club**



Speaking to the workers' reps David Burchill and Dayne Whittingham, they explained the background of the dispute.

Dave emphasises that the scaffolders take great pride in their role "we keep that site safe we are grafters" but the problems is that the maintenance contract has long been outsourced. Pay rates have fallen below the National



**The scaffolders have been on strike three times in just over a year as they seek to be paid the rate for the job**

The dispute unit has organised the scaffolders to write to their own local MPs and ask them to contact Actavo and British Steel and request they meet with Unite to resolve the strike. This has been very successful with Labour MPs and local Tory MPs (**Holly Mumby-Croft** and **Andrew Percy**) supporting this request.

An online petition demanding that Actavo pays the rate has already generated over 14,000 signatures.

The scaffolders acknowledge that the work of the dispute unit has rejuvenated the dispute.

The 12 week strike (the maximum length of time workers can legally walk out for) ended on Christmas Eve.

However, in a sinister move British Steel informed Actavo that they didn't have any work for the scaffolders, the first time in living memory that this was the case.

The workers were forced onto temporary layoffs or placed on gardening leave for the first weeks of 2022.

Ironically while our members were effectively locked out at least three other scaffolding firms, all of whom were paying NAECI rates, were working on the Scunthorpe site.

The workers were unbowed and held a further ballot and they recorded an 83 per cent vote in favour of fresh strike action.

An all out strike resumed on Wednesday 26 January and was proceeded by protests at all of Actavo's main offices in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

What is apparent is that while Actavo as the employer should have resolved the dispute, the major villain and who are "80 per cent responsible" is British Steel. British Steel could simply have increased the value of the contract,

ending the dispute. In addition, British Steel has refused to enter into direct tripartite talks with Unite and Actavo to resolve the dispute.

The cost of resolving the dispute is peanuts, it is estimated that the dispute could be resolved for just £250,000 a year.

Both Dave and Dayne make it clear that due to the actions of Actavo and British Steel and the every growing number of scaffolders being paid the NAECI rate working on the site, they are more determined than ever to see the dispute through to the end. They describe it is "personal" and now a matter of "principle" and that won't allow others to "take the piss".

The Scunthorpe scaffolders deserve the full credit and respect of all construction workers for standing up for what they believe in and defending our national agreements.

### Donations can be made as follows:

Bank Transfer to: Sort Code: 60 83 01

Account No: 20173962

Account Name: Unite North East Region 1% Fund

Reference: Actavo Limited and your branch number

**By Cheque made payable to "Unite the Union" and forwarded to the Leeds Regional Office, Unite the Union, 55 Call Lane, Leeds, LS1 7BW marked for the attention of the Regional Secretary (Actavo Limited Dispute).**

**Letters of support can also be forwarded to the Leeds Regional Office.**

# New CSCS Smart Check app to improve card site safety

A new digital app developed by the 38 card schemes displaying the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) logo, will radically improve the construction industry's card-checking procedures and site safety.

All sites should require everyone working in a construction occupation to hold a card displaying the CSCS logo and should check those cards regularly to ensure they are genuine and in date.

However, with multiple schemes offering CSCS logoed cards, the process can be complicated. This places an unrealistic expectation on site management teams to know every type of card available.

The new CSCS Smart Check app represents a major step forward. For the first time all 2.1 million cards displaying the CSCS logo can be electronically verified using a single app.

Andy Reakes, chair of the working group developing the app, said: "Having one app to electronically check all cards at the site gate, whether physical or virtual cards, will make life easier. It doesn't matter what card turns up – from asbestos to welding, if it displays a CSCS logo it will be compatible with the CSCS Smart Check app.

"Furthermore, the new app will alert employers to fraudulently obtained and

fake cards. Everyone knows the dangers unqualified workers bring to themselves and those working around them. The app will prevent unqualified workers gaining access to sites. CSCS Smart Check will be a vital element in assessing the competence of individuals coming onto construction sites."

The roll out of the app begins in April 2022 and will be available for free on Apple iOS and Android devices.

Initially CSCS Smart Check will function as a standalone application and will be incompatible with existing site entry systems such as turnstiles and desktop card readers. There will be no immediate impact on existing card checking operations.

Over the coming months the project team will engage with employers and stakeholders to begin the process of enabling existing card checking systems to become compatible with the new app. While there will be a period of transition, all sites are expected and encouraged to migrate to the new app over time.

Ultimately, the rollout of the app will result in some significant improvements to the way cards are checked at the site gates.



Mark Thomas

**The new CSCS smart card will make it easier to check all workers are properly qualified when entering sites**

To keep up to date with the development of the app, follow CSCS on Twitter via @CSCS or sign up for the CSCS newsletter. For further details regarding the CSCS Smart Check app visit [www.cscs.uk.com/smartcheck](http://www.cscs.uk.com/smartcheck).

CSCS Smart Check is out April 2022

The app is free to download

Available free via Google Play and the App Store

CSCS Smart Check will work for all card schemes displaying the CSCS logo

For the first time, it will allow all 2.1 million cards displaying the CSCS logo to be electronically verified using a single app



# WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT TAX REFUNDS

**Many construction workers can claim for work expenses and receive a tax refund**

We may be a nation that would rather chew off our own feet than talk about money, but it is time we had a real chat about tax refunds. The cost of living is soaring, and it's more important than ever to make sure you and your workmates aren't losing out.

Only one out of every three UK workers ever gets back what the taxman owes them. All told, that's around £300 million in unpaid tax refunds going to waste each and every year. At RIFT, we've already helped over 60,000 tradespeople get the tax refunds their out-of-pocket expenses entitle them to. That means we are putting £36 million back into construction workers' pockets every year – and there are still so many more people we could help if they only realised they could claim.

Far too many people never even know that they are missing out – or assume that it is too complicated to sort out a refund. That's why it is so important to spread the word about what we do at RIFT. Our unique Refer a Friend system pays out cash rewards and more when you tell your mates about us. Those rewards start at £50 – just for helping make sure a mate doesn't miss out.

The tax refund system is designed to lighten your load when you are footing the bill for essential work expenses like travel. When you are working on the books (PAYE) a lot of those day-to-day costs can earn you a refund at the end of the tax year. That includes food, fuel, accommodation and a whole range of other expenses – and it all mounts up fast. Ninety seven per cent of our customers in the construction trades say they would recommend us, so if you have never claimed a refund before, ask around your workmates to see what they are saying about RIFT.

RIFT Tax Refunds is the UK's leading expert in builders' expenses, and average claims with us come to £2,500. If you are dealing with a whole vanload of out-of-pocket expenses just to do your job, we'll put that cash back where it belongs, which is in your pocket – so let's keep the conversation going.

Visit [RIFTrefunds.co.uk/unite](https://RIFTrefunds.co.uk/unite) to find out more, use our free refund checker and get started.

We are pleased to offer discounted fees for Unite members.

This page is a counterpoint to the mainstream media and reviews important pieces of work for Unite members.

## Television

### Streaming/Netflix Don't Look Up



Shealah Craighead

Donald Trump doesn't feature in *Don't Look Up* or does he?

Normally we would associate films with a social comment with Ken Loach. For example *I Daniel Blake* or *Sorry We Missed You*. Other films such as *Pride* and *Brassed Off* remind us of the struggles we all face, so to watch an American made film on Netflix which has a social conscience is a breath of fresh air.

This satirical film throws a punch at the world's governments and their willingness to oblige the media and billionaire capitalists.

It is about the discovery of a comet headed for Earth, but it's not yet another disaster movie where inevitably, America comes to the rescue. Quite the opposite in fact. A reluctant president, her chief of staff son and a capitalist who see's the opportunity to exploit the situation, (you can put your own names to who they might be), refuse to accept the danger posed and manipulate a gullible nation by ridiculing the scientists through the media and daytime chat shows.

They create divisions in society using the three word soundbite "Don't Look Up". Some believe it, some don't. Now swap the fictional comet for factual climate change and the limited response to COP 26. It is vital that we all recognise how the media and other televised distractions are specifically designed to divert attention away from more important issues and in particular, what governments are doing behind our backs while everyone's heads are down reading, listening, or watching garbage.

It's time to all look up.

Bill Parry

#### Your Recommendations

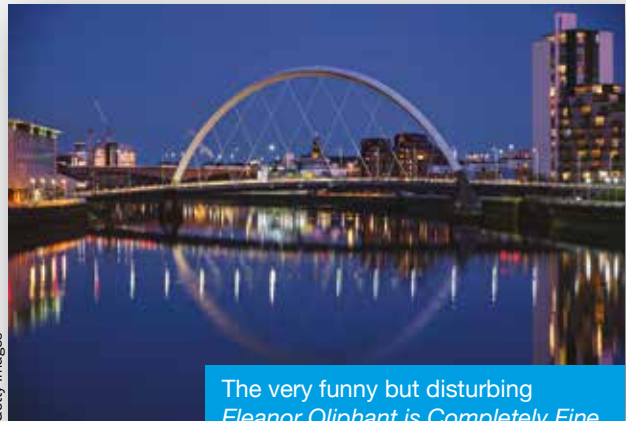
Unite members are encouraged to send ideas for future recommendations. We will cover film, television, DVDs and books. The only stipulation is a recommendation needs to be easily available. If you would like to write your own reviews please do but keep your contributions to 250 words. Send recommendations and reviews to [barckley.sumner@unitetheunion.org](mailto:barckley.sumner@unitetheunion.org)

## Books

### Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine by Gail Honeyman

*Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* is an award winning novel, it won the Costa debut novel award in 2017, however it is still an underappreciated joy and deserves even higher praise than it has received.

It is rare to unearth a novel which is both funny, profound and creates a unique window on the world we live in.



Getty Images

The very funny but disturbing *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* is set in Glasgow

The title character Eleanor is a solitary individual, who has a unique view of the world, much of it shaped by a very difficult childhood and upbringing. She lives alone in Glasgow, works in an office, in a job that she does diligently, but which is unfulfilling.

It is challenging to write about the book without spoiling the plot for new readers. However it is safe to say that it has some strong messages woven into it about loneliness, what it means to be happy and mental health.

There were several times I found myself laughing at certain scenes while being acutely aware that there was a far darker message lurking just behind. Other parts of the book are very serious and shocking.

Hopefully, Honeyman will be writing further books and they will be equally be funny and tell us something extra about the society will live in.

Barckley Sumner

## MEMBERSHIP FORM GB

Please use capitals

This address will be used for the purpose of ballots

Forename \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_  
Surname \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_  
House No./Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_  
City/Town \_\_\_\_\_  
Postcode \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Tel \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_

## About Your Job

Employer/Company Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Job Title \_\_\_\_\_  
Work Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Postcode \_\_\_\_\_ Work Tel. \_\_\_\_\_

**Which membership do you require?**  
 Enhanced full time (more than 21 hours per week)  
 Enhanced part time (up to 21 hours per week)  
 Enhanced low pay  
 Enhanced apprenticeship  
Year 1  Year 2  Year 3  Year 4  
Date apprenticeship started \_\_\_\_\_  
Date apprenticeship due to end \_\_\_\_\_  
 Driver Care (a separate Driver Care application form will be sent to you.)  
Date apprenticeship started \_\_\_\_\_  
Date apprenticeship due to end \_\_\_\_\_

## Authorisation of deduction of your trade union contribution from your pay (check-off)

**Note: Not all employers operate check-off.** I hereby authorise the deduction of Unite the Union subscriptions from my pay of such amounts as shall be notified to my employer on my behalf from time to time by Unite. I authorise my employer and Unite to share personal data necessary to operate check off and for my employer to inform Unite of any changes of address.

Are you paid?  Weekly  2-weekly  4-weekly  Monthly  
Payroll No. \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to abide by the union's rules. (Rule Book is available online)

NI No. \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**For Office use only**

Mem. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Employer Code \_\_\_\_\_ Workplace Code \_\_\_\_\_

## Political Campaigning

Unite fights for our members' interests through political and industrial campaigning on issues affecting you – from pay, pensions, and broader workplace rights to housing, equality issues and our NHS.  
**If you would like to be part of this, opt-in to our political fund for just 10p per week.** (tick here)

Those who choose not to opt-in will not be disadvantaged in any way compared with members who do opt-in, except in relation to control of the political fund.

**I support Unite in campaigning on our policies and members' priorities in the Labour Party and I would like to be a Labour Party Affiliate Supporter\* (this is free for political fund payers). I authorise Unite to share my personal data with the Labour Party for this purpose.** (tick here)

\* I agree to the terms listed at <https://support.labour.org.uk>

## Equal Opportunities

The provision of this information is to ensure equality for all and is not a requirement

Unite campaigns for equality for all and to ensure that women, black Asian ethnic minorities, disabled members, lesbian gay bisexual trans - LGBT+ and migrant workers are fully represented within the union. To find out more go to [www.unitetheunion.org/equalities](http://www.unitetheunion.org/equalities). Confidentiality is protected. Please complete:

Please tick your ethnic origin: Black/Asian  White  Please tick if you are LGBT+   
Please tick if you are a disabled person:  Please tick if you consider yourself to be a migrant worker

## Direct Debit Details – Instructions to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit



Service User Number **9 7 1 4 6 7**

Name of bank/building society \_\_\_\_\_  
Town of the Bank \_\_\_\_\_  
Sort Code \_\_\_\_\_  
Account Number \_\_\_\_\_  
Name(s) of Account Holder(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
On the selected day of the month:  7th  14th  21st  28th

## Instruction to your Bank or Building Society

Please pay Unite the union Direct Debit monthly from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Unite the union and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank Building Society.

I authorise the payment above. I agree to abide by the union's rules. (Rule Book is available online)

When you join Unite, you are also authorising the Union to deduct an additional amount for your subscription to your local branch fund.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Branch No. \_\_\_\_\_ Job Code \_\_\_\_\_ Recruitment Code \_\_\_\_\_

**Please send completed forms to: Freepost Plus RTZC-HKGG-RZBY, Unite the union, 2nd Floor, 160 Falcon Road, London SW11 2LN**

**28 April 2022**



REMEMBER  
THE DEAD

FIGHT FOR  
THE LIVING



# **INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY**

## **JOIN UNITE TODAY**

**Contact your Unite rep(s) or regional  
officer for events in your area**