

**INSIDE: Construction suicides • Crossrail blacklisting • Workers' Memorial Day**

Summer 2023 The magazine for Unite construction sector membership

# building WORKER



Construction, Allied  
Trades and Technicians



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# buildingWORKER



The construction industry needs to act now to stop workers killing themselves. A stark statement but one which can't and mustn't be ignored anymore.

Suicide rates for construction workers are four times higher than the rest of society and deaths are increasing. Tragically over 500 construction workers died by suicide last year.

Some major sites such as Hinkley Point have taken measures to reduce suicide rates and some employers are beginning to take mental health problems seriously. But we are barely touching the surface.

Yes it is a step forward that some employers are providing support to workers in mental distress but this is not the be and end all. Non-judgemental mental health support must become compulsory, so that workers can get the support they need when they need it.

But we need to go far further and tackle the issues that lead to construction workers suffering mental distress: long hours, precarious contracts, working away from home, bullying management, etc. There is no easy fix but it can't be ignored as the consequence is that more workers will needlessly die. Further information is on page 16-17.

Also on health and safety as this is the summer issue of *buildingWORKER* it is appropriate that we provide information to ensure construction workers protect themselves against the heat and sun. With our weather becoming more extreme, workers are being placed at greater risk.

Like so much of construction safety, employers often don't take heat risks seriously, as it threatens their profit margins. They are prepared to gamble with your long-term health to boost their short-term profits. Further details are on page 10-11.

In this issue there is an interview with Dan Collins, a Unite champion. Dan was victimised and forced out of the industry for raising serious health and safety concerns.

But he stood up to some of the UK's largest construction employers and through a mammoth legal battle exposed their wrongdoing.

The courage and commitment that Dan demonstrated means that those employers will think twice before they try their tricks again. For full details of Dan's battle please see page 14-15.

Finally, the very DNA of a union is to maximise the pay and conditions of its members. Despite the challenges that our industry faces, it is something that Unite officers are achieving for members. This issue contains details in the news pages of pay deals that have been won and also gives updates on negotiations and disputes. In particular our local government members covered by the Red Book craftworkers agreement are currently balloting for strike action as then face yet another substandard pay increase. Further information on this dispute will be included in the autumn issue.



**Jerry Swain and Jason Poulter**  
Unite national construction officers

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# Construction worker vindicated in Crossrail blacklisting

Unite member **Daniel Collins** has said he was vindicated after ending an eight year battle concerning contemporary blacklisting on the Crossrail project.

In February 2015 Mr Collins, an electrician was working on the Costain/Skanska joint venture at Bond Street, where he raised serious safety concerns.

He was dismissed from the project three days later, despite being initially told there was years of work.

He then could not secure employment on any other part of the project and discovered that employers were wrongly sharing information about him.

Having been forced out of the industry in order to secure work, Mr Collins with the support of Unite took a case of contemporary blacklisting.

In March the case was settled out of court and while the construction companies involved which included Crossrail, Costain, Skanska, T Clarke and NG Bailey denied liability an out of court settlement was paid to Mr Collins.

Unite general secretary **Sharon Graham** said: "This was a hugely significant case and demonstrates how Unite will back its members to the hilt."

*Dan Collins interview page 14-15*



**Dan Collins and other construction activists outside the High Court**

## CIJC talks near agreement

As *buildingWORKER* went to press members were being balloted on the Construction Industry Joint Council (CIJC) pay rise.

The CIJC is the largest construction agreement and primarily covers workers involved in civil engineering.

Unlike previous negotiations the current talks have been more positive with the employers' side recognising that the agreement needs substantial modernisation to be relevant.

The employers' side have offered a six per cent pay increase from 26 June 2023 and then a further 1.5 per cent increase from 1 January 2024. A compound increase of 7.59 per cent for the year. Additionally, the general operative (labourer) rate will increase by eight per cent immediately from June.

The taxed travel allowance will increase by six per cent from 26 June and then by a further 1.5 per cent from 1 January. The untaxed fare allowance will increase in line with CPI from 26 June.

The subsistence allowance will increase to £49.08 a night while industry sick pay (paid on top of Statutory Sick Pay) will increase to £154.02 and then rise further to £156.33 from 1 January.

With regards to the modernisation of the agreement the employers' side committed to examine the following elements of the agreement: pensions, holiday entitlement and pay, sickness provision and the entrance grade to the agreement. All of these elements will be negotiated on prior to the 2024 pay talks. There is also a greater understanding that the current sick pay rules are inadequate and require reform.

## All work related suicides must be investigated

Unite called in May for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to be given the power to investigate all work related suicides.

The call was made after an article was publicised in the British Medical Journal calling for all suicides of teachers to be investigated by the HSE, after a head teacher took her own life following a hostile Ofsted report.

Construction has the highest suicide rate of any sector and death rates stand at 33.82 deaths per 100,000 workers. There were 507 construction deaths last year.

Unite believes that the high suicide rate is a direct result of the working conditions in the industry with excessive hours, precarious employment and working away from home all contributing to the problems in the industry, combined with poor management and a macho culture.

By requiring the HSE to investigate these deaths the safety regulator would be obliged to consider these factors for the first time.

Unite national officer for construction **Jason Poulter** said: "Construction suicide rates are increasing dramatically and the critical issues that are causing workers to die by suicide are not being addressed.

"The vast majority of construction employers do not take the mental wellbeing of their workforce seriously and until the HSE is given the powers and the resources to investigate these tragedies properly that will continue to be the case."

*For further information on suicides in construction see page 16-17*

## Joint investigation needed following HS2 fatality

Unite has demanded a full joint investigation following the death of a worker on a HS2 site in the West Midlands.

In late April a worker in their 70's was fatally injured on the Balfour Beatty joint venture site in Solihull.

Unite national officer for construction Jerry Swain said: "After such a tragic

accident there will of course be an official investigation by the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) but it may not conclude and issue its findings for some considerable time.

"In the meantime BBV will be conducting its own investigation and Unite believes that this must be conducted jointly with the union. It is only by working collectively together

that we can discover what occurred, learn from this tragedy, and provide the workforce with reassurance and confidence that everything is being done to protect their safety."

**STOP PRESS:** In a very disappointing development which has undermined safety on HS2 management at BBV initially refused to engage with Unite on this matters.



Getty Images

Unite is calling for a joint investigation following a fatal accident on the HS2 development in the West Midlands

## Evidence sought in blacklisting inquiry

Unite has widened its search for evidence that union officials may have colluded with the blacklisting of construction workers.

In the spring of 2022 Unite established an independent inquiry into allegations that some union officials may have colluded in the blacklisting of construction workers.

A legal team of Nick Randall KC (Matrix Chambers), John Carl Townsend (33 Chancery Lane Chambers) and Paul Heron (Public Interest Law Centre) were

appointed to examine if any officials from Unite or its predecessor unions (T&G, Ucatt, Amicus, AEEU or MSF) were involved in the blacklisting of construction workers.

The inquiry has now launched an online portal (<https://ibci.uk/>) to allow anyone who has relevant information to submit it to the inquiry.

Unite has been actively campaigning on blacklisting and its effect on construction workers since 2009 when it was discovered that an organisation named

the Consulting Association was actively blacklisting over 3,000 construction workers.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "No stone will be left unturned to obtain conclusive proof whether any current or former union officials were involved in the blacklisting of workers.

"Blacklisting is a disgusting practice which ruins workers' lives. Unite has been and continues to be at the forefront of stamping out this practice once and for all."

## Unite members support BARE protest

Members of Unite were involved in a protest by new rank and file construction workers' group Builders Against Rogue Employers (BARE), in April.

The workers held their protest outside a site in Leadenhall in the city of London where the client is Brookfield and Partners and the principal

contractor is Multiplex.

BARE organised the protest as it had discovered that Multiplex's subcontractors Focus and Franktons was mistreating workers who were undertaking logistics and security worker roles.

Focus were requiring their workers to operate through payroll companies

which were charging them over a £1,000 a year just to receive their wages. While Franktons were requiring their workers to operate on zero hour contracts.

BARE has said it is committed to repeating their protests at other sites where the actions of rogue employers are exposed.



Members of BARE protest at the Multiplex site in Leadenhall in the City of London

## Scotland takes mental health action

Members of the construction sector in Scotland took the opportunity of this year's mental health awareness week (Saturday 15 May – Sunday 21 May) to provide support for their workers and local communities.

Unite vice convenor at South Lanarkshire council **Kenny Wallace**, organised a donation of £200 to Keep the Heid, a local men's mental health group based in Blantyre. The donation was to help kick start the group and allow it to develop and print promotional materials.

Keep the Heid, deals with both addiction issues and mental health problems. It provides a safe space for men from all industries to discuss their mental health problems.

Unite has also begun to distribute the organisation's leaflets in the workplace.

The local Unite branch also donated £65 to the Blantyre youth football team. The money was used to purchase green ribbons to wear on their kits, to highlight mental health awareness week at a tournament in Motherwell.

Meanwhile Unite activist **Graeme Jenkins** conducted a stress survey among Unite's members at Dundee City Council, during mental health awareness week.

The survey asked a number of questions including if workers were experiencing stress at work and more tellingly if they were experiencing stress would they speak to a manager/supervisor about the problem.



Blantyre football club have received support from Unite

# New safety innovation at Hinkley Point

Two Unite reps working at Hinkley Point have devised a new safety innovation which they hope will be adopted on other major sites.

All workers at Hinkley Point now have a QI code printed on a sticker on their helmets. Workers are now able to scan the sticker when they encounter a

problem or a safety concern and they will receive a reply within 48 hours.

The proposal was put forward by Unite's reps **Christian Gherghita** and **Gary Box**. In addition to reporting safety concerns workers who scan the code will also be able to join Unite or read the latest information about the site.

Any safety concerns will be mapped and recorded and this will allow the management at Hinkley Point to examine if there are any consistent concerns being raised at any particular part of the mega project.

The QI code scheme could also be further extended with speakers of different languages catered for, alternatively it can be devised to provide access for workers to undertake workplace surveys.

Getty Images



Hinkley Point workers have devised a new safety system on the project

## Magenta Living workers secure asbestos deal

Over 100 maintenance and repair workers employed by Magenta Living have secured a deal on working with asbestos.

The workers based on the Wirral, who work in social housing, had taken extensive industrial action over the early part of the year after Magenta Living introduced new rules which required them to undertake asbestos removal.

The strike action ended after an agreement was hammered out by local regional officer **John Sheppard** and agreed by members. This made it clear that the asbestos work was voluntary and that workers who opted out of asbestos work would not be compelled to undertake it.

Unite general secretary **Sharon Graham** said: "The safety of our members is non-negotiable and Unite always supports workers concerned about their health and wellbeing in the workplace."

- If you are asked to work with asbestos and are concerned about your safety you should immediately consult your shop steward or your regional officer.

## Harlow workers strike over pay

Workers employed by HTS in Harlow, who undertake maintenance and repair work on the council's housing stock, took strike action in April and May.

The 300 strong workforce are angry that they are paid below the rates that other workers in neighbouring councils receive. Many of them are paid less than £12 an hour. Pay rates are so low that many of the workers have been forced to use foodbanks in order to get by.

Although the workers are officially outsourced, HTS is 100 per cent owned by the council and the workers believe that their pay should be re-graded to local authority pay rates.

The Conservative controlled council has refused to enter into negotiations despite recording assets of £63 million.

Unite national lead officer **Onay Kasab** said: "Harlow council's deliberate and needless curbing of HTS' workers' pay is the ugly face of outsourcing, Its' councillors know the council's finances are healthy. Unite will not let Harlow council hide behind HTS so it can underpay staff and leave them to struggle during a cost of living crisis."

# Pay and Bargaining



Getty Images

**Council craftworkers are balloting for industrial action**

## Red book workers ballot for strike action over pay

Thousands of Unite craftworkers employed under the local government red book in England, and Wales are balloting for strike action in a dispute over pay.

The workers who are predominantly employed in housing maintenance roles, have rejected the local government employers' pay offer which is worth between 3.88 per cent and 9.42 per cent, depending on grade. With the real inflation rate (RPI) standing at 11.4 per cent, it amounts to a substantial real terms wage cut.

Red book workers have experienced over a decade of real terms pay cuts and pay freezes which has resulted in their pay being reduced by a quarter in real terms.

The current pay offer is worse than the offer in 2022 which was also a real terms pay cut.

Unite national officer for local government craftworkers **Jason Poulter** said: "The employers' lack of engagement with the unions has, frankly been disdainful. They spent barely 48 hours considering the unions detailed pay claim.

"This dispute will not be resolved until employers engage in proper consultation with unions."

The red book dispute is in conjunction with the larger local government green book whose members have been offered the same inadequate pay offer.

- A separate local government pay dispute is also underway in Scotland.

## West Midlands housing workers get pay boost

Housing workers employed by Citizen Housing Group have secured a significantly improved pay increase as a result of Unite's campaigning.

The 1,000 strong workforce who provide and maintain social housing in Birmingham and Coventry, were offered a pay increase of five per cent and a £500 lump sum payment.

Despite two other unions accepting the offer, Unite members rejected the deal as it was substantially below inflation.

Unite managed to get the offer improved to a six per cent increase and a lump sum payment of £1,500.

Unite regional officer **Sharon Harding** said: "Unite will be looking to build on this deal in future pay negotiations at Citizens Housing Group."

## South East motorway maintenance workers secure sick pay

Following a long running campaign, Unite has secured full sick pay from day one for all motorway maintenance workers in the South East motorway network.

In May as part of the annual pay negotiations for workers employed by Egis Road Operations on the M40, it was agreed that workers will receive sick pay from day one.

The campaign to secure full sick pay for motorway maintenance workers in the South East has been championed by Unite regional officer **Malcolm Bonnet** who has organised the workforce to ensure that sick pay is paid.

The campaign began in 2014 when it was agreed that workers employed on the CPS Connect contract (Balfour Beatty, Egis Road Operations and Atkins) adopt the policy.

This was followed in 2022 by Kier, on motorway network areas three and four who started being paid sick pay from day one.

Unite will be now looking to secure full sick pay from day one for all motorway maintenance workers throughout the UK.

**All motorway maintenance workers in the South East and on the M25 now receive full sick pay**



Getty Images

# Qatar must introduce heat safety laws

Occupational health experts have called on Qatar to introduce new laws to protect workers against heat stress. With temperatures in the gulf state regularly exceeding 40 degrees centigrade, many workers especially construction workers are placed at greater risk of injury, illness and death due to excessive heat.

The call for action was made during an International Labour Organisation (ILO) conference held in Qatar's capital city of Doha.

The ILO experts believe that Qatar has the capacity to enforce such measures and that their introduction would place pressure on other Gulf states to introduce similar measures.



Getty Images

**The focus remains on workers' safety in Qatar even after the end of the World Cup**

## Toxic chemicals warnings blocked

A small group of countries together with the chemicals industry is blocking the implementation of a United Nations treaty on toxic substances.

A small number of countries led by China, Russia and India continue to block the listing of chrysotile (white asbestos) and pesticides under the Rotterdam Convention on hazardous substances. Any substance listed under the convention requires hazard

warnings to be placed on any export of these substances.

A group of 40 unions, public interest, asbestos and pesticide action groups have published an open letter, arguing that the blocking tactics by a small number of countries, undermines the viability of the convention and undermines the objective of warning nations that dangerous substances are entering their country.

## New safety rights needed due to climate change

A leading United States think tank is calling for the strengthening of safety laws to protect workers against extreme weather conditions caused by climate change.

The National Employment Law Project, argues that workers will increasingly need to have the right to

refuse dangerous work.

With weather becoming more extreme, this could include very hot or cold temperature, high winds or excessive rainfall.

The report states, workers: "Must have a real right to refuse dangerous work in the face of natural disasters."

## New Zealand union calls for silica ban

New Zealand's national union body the NZCTU is calling on the country's government to protect working people from silica dust. Many workers, especially construction workers are exposed to silica dust when stone is drilled or cut.

Exposure to silica can lead to breathing difficulties and is a primary reason for the premature death of thousands

of workers throughout the world every year.

NZCTU president Richard Wagstaff said: "There is a need for strong and swift regulatory action to properly protect workers, including moving towards a ban on the material. We need to act now to stop or face another epidemic of the size, scale and impact of that caused by asbestos."

## Deadly substances found in Turkey earthquake rubble

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has warned of the presence of asbestos in many of the buildings that were destroyed by the earthquake which hit Turkey in early February.

The IFRC said: "With more

than 210 million tons of asbestos rubble, relief teams and victims are being exposed to elevated health risks from asbestos."

Other hazardous materials regularly found in the rubble include: lead, florescent lights and mercury.

**The rubble from the Turkish earthquake is toxic**



Getty Images

# Earning not burning

Luke Collins, Unite national health and safety advisor

**With weather becoming more extreme, construction workers are at increasing risk of being made ill by being exposed to excessive sun and heat**

### Sunlight

Too much sunlight is harmful to your skin. A tan is a sign that the skin has been damaged. The damage is caused by ultraviolet (UV) rays in sunlight. Skin cancer is one of most common forms of cancer in the UK. Too much exposure to UV radiation from the sun can cause skin damage including sunburn, blistering, skin ageing and in the long term could lead to skin cancer. Those with a family history of skin cancer (and those with pale skin/ fair hair) may be more at risk.

### Who is at risk?

If work keeps you outdoors for a long time your skin could be exposed to more sun than is healthy. Outdoor workers that are at risk include construction workers. You should take particular care if you have:

- Fair or freckled skin that doesn't tan, or goes red or burns before it tans
- Red or fair hair and light coloured eyes
- A large number of moles
- People of all skin colours should take care to avoid damage to the eyes, overheating and dehydration.

### What are the harmful effects?

In the short term, even mild reddening of the skin from sun exposure is a sign of damage. Sunburn can blister the skin and make it peel. Longer term problems can arise. Too much sun speeds up ageing of the skin, making it leathery, mottled and wrinkled. The most serious effect is an increased chance of developing skin cancer.

### What can you do to protect yourself?

- Keep your top on
- Wear a hat with a brim or a flap that covers the ears and the back of the neck
- Stay in the shade whenever possible, during your breaks and especially at lunch time
- Use a high factor sunscreen of at least SPF15 on any exposed skin
- Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration
- Check your skin regularly for any unusual moles or spots. See a doctor promptly if you find anything that is changing in shape, size or colour, itching or bleeding.

### Heat Stress

#### What is heat stress?

Heat stress occurs when the body's means of controlling its internal temperature starts to fail. Air temperature, physical activity, humidity and clothing are all factors which can cause heat stress. It may not be obvious to someone just passing through the workplace that there is a risk of heat stress.

#### How does the body react to heat?

The body reacts to heat by increasing the blood flow to the skin's surface and by sweating. This cools the body as heat is carried to the surface from within by the increased blood flow and sweat evaporates.

#### Typical example of a heat stress situation

Someone wearing protective clothing and performing heavy work in hot and humid conditions could be at risk of heat stress because:

- Sweat evaporation is restricted by the type of clothing and the humidity of the environment
- Heat will be produced within the body due to the work being undertaken and, if insufficient heat is lost, body temperature will rise
- As body temperature rises the body reacts by increasing the amount of sweat produced, which may lead to dehydration
- Heart rate also increases which puts

Working outside in the sun can have long term risks for construction workers





Workers wearing PPE, undertaking hard construction work, are at risk of heat stress

- additional strain on the body
- If the body is gaining more heat than it can lose body temperature will continue to rise
- Eventually it reaches a point when the body's control mechanism starts to fail
- The symptoms will worsen the longer someone remains working in the same conditions.

### Employers' responsibilities

Employers are under a duty to look after the health and safety of their staff under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HASAWA). The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to make a suitable assessment of the risks to the health and safety of their employees. These duties cover temperatures and include providing adequate controls to comply with the law, which is to ensure indoor temperatures are reasonably comfortable.

#### Temperature at work key points:

- Employers should provide a "reasonable" temperature in the workplace
- Employers should have a risk assessment for the health and safety of their employees to assess and control risks in the workplace
- The workplace temperature is a potential hazard that employers should address

- Employers will need to include in any assessment the risks of outdoor working.

### Health and safety rep rights

Safety reps are entitled to full information from their employers to enable them to carry out their functions under regulation seven. The approved code of practice (ACOP) to the regulations sets out what information the employer should make available to safety reps.

#### This includes:

- Any proposed changes that may affect health and safety
- Technical information about hazards and necessary precautions, including information provided by manufacturers and suppliers
- Information and statistical records on accidents, dangerous occurrences and notifiable industrial diseases
- Any other information specifically related to matters affecting the health and safety at work of employees, such as measures to check

the effectiveness of health and safety arrangements.

### Enforcement of the Safety

Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations 1977 (SRSCR) Regulations: An inspector from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or the local authority can intervene in disputes concerning safety reps where an employer has failed:

- To provide information and facilities.

### Reporting to the HSE

If our members or their colleagues are being forced to conduct activity in an unsafe manner, the HSE offers an anonymous reporting function, below: <https://tinyurl.com/3yzw8k2r>

There will be an option to report anonymously, ensuring the employer will not be aware who made the report. The HSE will ask for a name (this is only for the HSE's records and in the event of the HSE needing to contact our member with an update).

#### Useful Links:

- HSE [www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/index.htm)
- Worksmart <https://worksmart.org.uk/health-advice/where-you-work/summer-heat/there-maximumtemperature-workplaces>
- ACAS [www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=5791](http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=5791)
- HSE <https://contact.hse.gov.uk/where-in-uk-details/>

# PROTECT YOURSELF FROM HEAT & SUN

**Long-term sun exposure can cause skin cancer and working in hot weather causes heat exhaustion**

**Protect yourself against the heat and sun**

- **Keep your top on**
- **Wear a hat with a brim**
- **Stay in the shade whenever possible**
- **Use a high factor sunscreen of at least SPF15**
- **Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration**
- **Check your skin regularly for any unusual moles or spots**
- **See your employer's risk assessment on working in hot weather.**

Please pull out and place on a workplace noticeboard

# YOURSELF IN THE SUN



Construction, Allied  
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For more information go to

- HSE [www.hse.gov.uk/temperature](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature)
- Worksmart <https://worksmart.org.uk/health-advice>
- ACAS [www.acas.org.uk/](http://www.acas.org.uk/)

**Dan Collins with fellow construction workers following his day at the High Court**



# Beating the bosses and securing workplace justice

**Dan Collins** is a hero for construction workers. He was mistreated and victimised by some of the largest construction companies in the UK, but through sheer determination and with the assistance of Unite, and employment solicitors Thompsons he staged a monumental eight year battle and won. Collins, an electrician, became active within the trade union movement because he had become disheartened with the construction industry's employment practices and the general neglect of health and safety (H&S) on construction sites. He says this was because: "Everything was moving towards agency and bogus

self-employment. I couldn't find any direct employment. Unless you were part of the in-crowd you couldn't get a direct job. I was sick and tired of dodgy agencies, dodgy tax schemes and being around Victorian ways of employment where companies would sack you for challenging H&S because of your employment status."

Collins continued to be active and taking roles on sites when in early 2015 he secured work on the Crossrail project at Bond Street. "I was hired by an agency but was on PAYE and told there was three years worth of work. He says: "It

was during the civil's phase when there was a lot of danger."

Soon after starting Collins witnessed a dangerous procedure. Labourers were being asked to carry 25kg bags of concrete across a 400mm raised board with no handrails.

He raised the issue with his supervisor and was told to complete an observation form. But no action was taken. He then raised it with the civil engineer because "it was really unsafe".

Then he was told the following Friday

that “due to a downturn in work” he was no longer needed. However Collins was sure that it was because he had continued to raise safety concerns.

Collins immediately went to the site office and told management in no uncertain terms: “My union wouldn’t stand for it.”

Collins and fellow activists then held a demonstration outside the site. With support of other activists he ran a “Crossfail” campaign exposing the problems on the project. This was at a highly sensitive time as Rene Tkacik a 43 year old Slovakian had recently been killed by falling concrete on the project.

Collins had hoped the matter would end there but this was just the start of the challenges he faced. He says: “I started applying for jobs, left, right and centre. Only got work with small companies but not on large sites.” Within six months he realised he had a problem.

Collins says he was applying for jobs and putting his CV on library sites and agencies would initially show an interest but then he was told jobs were delayed or he wasn’t needed “when I had friends who were being hired.” By October 2016 he realised that to find regular decent paying work he would have to leave the construction industry and he now works as a maintenance electrician and a shop steward in the aviation sector.

Most workers in this situation would rightly be bitter but would probably feel unable to fight back. Collins carried on fighting.

He explains: “I started doing subject access requests (a legal request for an organisation to supply all the information they hold on a person) I never thought I would get anywhere.” Collins was wrong the information he received was jaw dropping. “The information that came back showed that they were talking to each other and discussed how they were blocking me. They were colluding on different applications.”

Examples of the information he got back included an internal email from Costain that said: “We have a potential

issue. Danny Collins is part of the Unite activist group”.

While a labour manager at T Clarke wrote an email which said: “Read and delete!!! I hope we never end up with this bloke on any of our sites.” Armed with this information Collins met with Gail Cartmail then Unite’s assistant general secretary and now the union’s executive head of operations, for assistance. Cartmail put him in touch with the solicitors Thompsons, “who helped me put the jigsaw together.”

Unlike many construction workers Collins had kept all his application forms and had a clear paper trail to support his case that he had been blacklisted out of the industry. “I was very organised and very methodical in my applications but even so it took six years to put the case together.” Collins acknowledges the role of Thompsons was crucial. “I couldn’t have done it on my own.”

Collins’ case for contemporary blacklisting, breaches of data protection and misuse of private information, taken against Crossrail, Costain, Skanska, T Clarke and NG Bailey concluded with a statement in open court in March. The companies involved denied liability but agreed to pay with an agreed statement and damages to Collins and also paid his legal costs, stating they made the

payments, “for purely commercial reasons and without admission of liability or wrongdoing.”

How does Collins feel about the length of time it took to secure justice and was it worth it? “It was horrific when it was happening. Frustrating and emotional. It took a long time and was very frustrating. There is no end to being blacklisted but there is now some closure.”

Also why does Collins think he was targeted in the first place? “They feared me. I was diligent in my union activities. They didn’t want the workforce to be organised. It was never about having a revolution it was about what is fair and right.”

Given his experiences Collins is clear that union organisation is absolutely essential in construction. “Workers have a right to be safe. A right to decent pay and a right to employment rights. That can only be achieved through unions. Workers as a collective need to be organised.”

In addition to his legal victory Collins was also elected from the London and Eastern region onto Unite’s Executive Council in April. Given his experiences there is no doubt that he will be a strong voice in favour of organising and defending workers at the very highest levels of the union.



Jess Hurd

Getty Images

# Saving lives: tackling construction suicides

The construction sector has made significant strides in workplace safety, with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reporting in 2022 a 16.7 per cent drop in fatalities.

But there's a hidden epidemic in construction. Even as fewer people die in workplace accidents in construction, the suicide rate has relentlessly continued climbing.

Since 2015, Glasgow Caledonian University and the Lighthouse Construction Industry Charity have compiled figures on suicides in construction. Their latest analysis found the suicide rate for construction occupations in 2021 rose to 33.82 per 100,000 from 25.52 per 100,000 in 2015 – the highest rate in any sector. These figures serve as a stark reminder

that health and safety is so much more than simply preventing accidents.

Suicide in the construction sector is a complex problem – there's no one reason that more people take their lives in construction than in any other sector, explains Unite national officer **Jason Poulter**. "For starters, it's a very long-hours culture, and construction workers are often expected to be away from home – and so away from their families and usual support networks – for long periods of time."

Construction is still a predominantly male working environment, and with this environment comes many of the coping mechanisms that some turn to in times of stress, such as gambling, alcohol and substance addiction, which often end up exacerbating already poor mental health.

"There is definitely a drinking culture in construction," said Poulter. "There's having a drink, then there's having a drink -- going down the pub with your mates can be a positive thing, but it can just as easily spiral into addiction for some if they're already under a lot of stress."

Hinkley Point nuclear power station in Somerset – the UK's largest construction project since the Second World War – was an exemplar of mental ill health plaguing the construction sector in the first few years of the project.

Back in 2019 in the first four months of that year, the union had been informed of at least 10 suicide attempts by workers on the site. Since then, Unite and EDF, the client at Hinkley Point, have worked together to support workers' mental health.

Unite convenor at Hinkley Point **Malcolm Davies** in particular hailed EDF's mental health buddies system, which is a network of volunteers who are trained as mental health first aiders to provide support and guidance to their colleagues.

"We now have over 400 trained mental health first aiders on site, the most we've ever had – with more and more people coming forward to take part," he explained.

Malcolm believes that what has made the programme so successful is that it has slowly but surely changed the culture at the construction site by removing the



Getty Images

**Hinkley Point has taken radical action with Unite to reduce suicides**



**Construction sites are busy places but it doesn't stop workers feeling alone**

stigma associated with talking about mental health.

“People find comfort in talking about their mental health, especially when they can talk to their peers. Our mental health first aiders are often the first port of call and can signpost people to different types of support.

Unite rep **Matthew**, 27, trained as a mental health first aider at Hinkley Point and said it's been a very rewarding experience.

“I have suffered from anxiety and depression, and I have family who have been through some tough times, so when I started to feel better, I really wanted to help others.”

Unite rep **Anthony**, 56, will soon train to become a mental health first aider. Like Matthew, Anthony said he's keen to help others “because mental health is something that's close to my heart”.

“I've got a little lad who's severely autistic, and when he was first diagnosed, I went through a really rough period of depression for about a year. I'd like to pass on my experience to others, and sit and talk to people, because that's what I myself needed.”

“I'm 56 and when I was a young lad, you just kept things to yourself because otherwise you'd be classed as a softy if you talked about mental health and tried to get help. We've got signs all over the site here that say, 'It's okay not to be okay' and I think that's fantastic.”

Matthew believes that working conditions in construction definitely contribute to the mental health crisis in the industry.

“There's a lot of long hours, weekend work, and working away from home that I think plays a big role. You end up missing time with your kids, with your partner and parents.”

While Malcolm said he's very proud of the mental health work both the employer and Unite have done at Hinkley Point – he worries that not all in the sector have access to that level of support.

“On large construction projects, especially in nuclear, there's a lot more money for mental health projects.”

“I think it's up to unions like Unite to make sure we've got reps on the smaller projects, and make sure we get those reps trained on mental health.”

Jason Poulter likewise said Unite and other unions have a much bigger role to play to tackle the mental health crisis.

But he emphasised that it is absolutely vital that employers look at the root cause and not simply treat the symptoms – symptoms that in many ways the employers themselves are responsible for.

“There's needs to be root and branch reform of the employment models used in construction. Rest periods aren't happening. They're not paying holidays. They're not encouraging people to take time off. There's no work-related mental health risk assessments.

“There's also the issue of bogus self-employment where workers are burdened with tax returns and having to pay for accountants, without any of the benefits of working for yourself. The reality is you're under the instruction of someone else and they can fire you on the spot. They've blacklisted workers; they have a culture of fire and rehire – it's the most precarious industry in the entire economy.”

Jason said that it is not until all these factors are addressed that meaningful change will happen.

# Fighting fo

Construction workers in London gathered at the Building Worker Statue at Tower Hill



Unite construction NISC chair Paul Mooney addressing workers in some inclement weather

Construction workers across the UK gathered together for International Workers' Memorial Day on Friday 28 April.

As ever workers were unified in their pledge to "remember the dead but fight like hell for the living".

However this year there was a growing awareness that while IWMD is right to focus on fatal accidents at work and workplace diseases, construction workers are also at a far greater risk of suicide (see page 16/17) than any other industrial sector.

Construction suicide rates are four times higher than the average with over 500 construction workers killing themselves in the previous year. The suicide risk directly relates to how and where construction workers are employed. With precarious employment, excessive hours and a high incidence of working away from home all being factors in the suicide rate.

There was a large turnout at the construction statue in Liverpool on IWMD



# r the Living

The issue of the high suicide rate was raised directly by Unite London and Eastern regional secretary **Pete Kavanagh** when he spoke at the IWMD event at the building worker statue at Tower Hill in London. He said: “We need to redouble our efforts on mental health.” Kavanagh recalled that construction workers were also at the sharp end of the Covid pandemic where they often had to continue to work on sites, as working from home was not an option, putting them at increased risk, with workers dying due to a lack of social distancing and inadequate PPE.

At the same event Unite national officer **Jerry Swain** made an impassioned speech, commentating on the reduction in construction deaths compared to 20 years ago he said: “Should we be congratulating ourselves on the reduction of deaths. No. We are trade unionists, we are saving 60 lives a year but there are still far too many workers dying or being injured.”

He also warned workers, of employers trying to take the moral high ground on safety. “At HS2 employers don’t want us on site, they say they can do safety without us. But workers have to be the master’s of their own destiny and responsible for their own safety.”

Swain also highlighted the inherent ongoing dangers in the industry remembering the Canary Wharf crane collapse 21 years ago which left three workers dead and which the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigated for years, without ever coming to a conclusion about why it occurred and he reminded those in attendance that we are still awaiting answers from the Bow crane collapse nearly three years ago which left one dead.

Finally Swain highlighted how health and safety is a “political issue” and the present Conservative government is seeking to “create a bonfire of safety legislation, which could place construction workers at renewed risk.



**A poignant tribute to building workers killed at work**

**Workers at Hinkley Point gather in nearby Bridgwater for IWMD**



# People's Partnership

## New name, same support to the construction industry

Nicola Sinclair, head of responsible business and construction

For over 80 years B&CE has been the people's partner, so we found it fitting to change our name to People's Partnership. After all these years our values remain – putting people first, at the heart and soul of everything we do – continuing to help them build strong financial foundations for life and supporting the construction industry any way we can.

Established by unions and employer federations in 1942 under its former name – B&CE – People's Partnership was formed to help construction workers build up holiday pay. It continues to support people in the construction industry to this day, with its Employee Life Cover and Employee Accident Cover providing financial protection for workers and their families.

People's Partnership also operates the B&CE Charitable Trust, which has helped 1,000s of people in construction get back on their feet. Set up in 1991, the Trust funds research into occupational health and safety in the construction community. And its corporate grants and awards – including the Mowlem Award and Occupational Health Research

Award – have helped build a stronger future for the UK construction industry.

We're proud to be a profit for people organisation. As a business without shareholders, we re-invest our profits to help customers and achieve better financial outcomes for our members. We're constantly looking for more efficient ways to deliver straightforward and trusted financial products and services.

2012 marked a pivotal moment in the pensions industry. We welcomed the introduction of auto-enrolment – a government policy that led to over 10 million people saving into a pension scheme. We soon realised that working people in other sectors also needed a high-quality workplace pension and so we introduced The People's Pension.

During the last 10 years, The People's Pension has grown to become one of the largest master trust workplace pensions in the UK. Members of the pension scheme are treated equally – they all benefit from the same charging structure. And profits are used to actively reward loyal savers

through a rebate on the management charge.

The People's Pension:

- Trusted by 100,000+ employers to manage their pension
- Protects £20 billion\* of money for six million plus workers
- £1 million given back to savers a month through a rebate on the management charge.

We've achieved a lot in 80 years, but we're not stopping there – People's Partnership will introduce more products to help people make better financial choices. We've always aimed to put the tools into our customers' hands to create simplicity. This means developing products for the people who need them to make their financial lives easier to manage.

To find out more about People's Partnership or any of our products for the construction industry, visit [www.peoplespartnership.co.uk/more-information](http://www.peoplespartnership.co.uk/more-information)

\*As at 03/05/2023.



People's Partnership has been looking after construction workers for over 80 years



A claim with Rift might provide sufficient funds for a holiday

Getty Images

# Get More out of your summer with RIFT Tax

With the cost of living crisis still raging, we're all looking for ways to stretch our finances a little bit further. Now that the summer's heating up, that means many of us are having to scale down our plans for treating our families, meeting our friends and making the most of the warmer weather.

Learning how to get more out of your money is always a good idea, of course – but what if we told you the real secret isn't cutting back, it's claiming back? When the cost of living is pushing everyday costs through the roof, it's more important than ever for PAYE construction workers to claim back every penny of the tax they are owed.

Right now, an average construction industry tax refund claimed with RIFT comes to over £3,000. That's easily enough to:

- Wipe out a nagging debt, bill or credit card balance
- Free up the disposable income the

cost of living crisis has been squeezing

- Treat the family to something truly special this summer.

Remember, when you work on the books in construction, claiming back the tax you've paid on work travel and other essential costs is your legal right. This is cash that belongs back in your pocket, but the taxman won't simply hand it over unless you build a properly supported claim. You've got to prove what you are owed—and that's where RIFT's expertise comes in. We handle the complicated HMRC paperwork, talk to the taxman on your behalf and maximise your refund by pinpointing every cost that earns you tax back.

Whatever your ideal summer looks like, don't let a missed or under-claimed tax refund hold your imagination back this year. When you claim your refund with RIFT, you're putting the UK's leading tax experts on your team. We take care of every

step of your claim, from tracking down tricky details to chasing HMRC for you until you get your cash. We're not just 'fair weather friends' for the summer, either. RIFT supports you throughout the year, answering questions and solving problems. At the same time, our growing library of guides, tools and videos will help you keep control of your spending, save for major purchases and build your financial future.

Before you start cutting back on your summer plans this year, make sure you're claiming back everything the taxman owes you.

Have an amazing summer with your family and friends – and call us on 01233 628648 or visit <http://riftrefunds.co.uk> to find out more about how RIFT can put vital cash back in your wallet. Remember to mention your UNITE membership for an exclusive discount on our fees.

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

## TV/iPlayer

### Strike: Inside the Unions

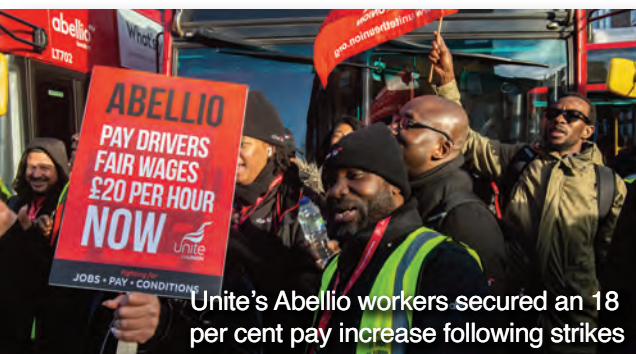
*Strike: Inside the Unions* follows Unite, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and the RMT as last year's winter of discontent extended into 2023. The documentary goes behind the scenes with the RMT's Mick Lynch, the RCN's Pat Cullen and Unite general secretary Sharon Graham during rail, NHS and bus strikes. As inflation rocketed – a wave of industrial action engulfed the country.

The documentary comes with a disclaimer that neither the government nor the employers would take part. Instead, we're treated to a clip of Grant Shapps blaming Putin for runaway prices. For the government this obscuration was par for the course,

The rail companies perhaps did not want to put their views across, because, as Lynch points out, 'the dead hand of government' prevented them from making anything other than a pretence at negotiations. The silence from bus company Abellio, where 1,800 Unite members in South London were on strike, was best filled by the facts. 'It's not like they haven't got the money, they made £350 million (last year),' says Sharon Graham to workers on the picket line.

It is at the Abellio picket where we see just how difficult the decision to strike is, the strain it puts on individuals and the dedication of the reps who keep the workers standing together. The Abellio workers went on to win an 18 per cent pay rise after striking for 20 days. *Strike: Inside the Unions* demonstrated just how important organised labour is for defending workers when they need it most.

Ryan Fletcher



Unite's Abellio workers secured an 18 per cent pay increase following strikes

Getty Images

## Books

### The Power of Geography

by Tim Marshall

Geography may seem like a dry academic subject but the author Tim Marshall transforms it to explain how a country is shaped and where it is located often denotes whether it will be a success or failure.

*The Power of Geography* is Marshall's sequel to *Prisoners of Geography*, which correctly predicted the current invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

Marshall examines 10 maps of countries which he believes will shape world events.

Of particular interest is the chapter on the Sahel (the arid rocky expanse of land bordering the Sahara desert straddling many African countries). Marshall explains how desertification and instability in this area is leading to the migrant crisis affecting Europe.

The chapter on Ethiopia is equally fascinating, from being one of the poorest places on earth in the mid-1980's with terrible famines, the country is set to become one of the most successful in Africa. It is described as the continent's water tower, with many rivers including the Nile originating there. However, with the growing benefit of cheap hydro-electric generated power comes threats, as the damming of the Nile, could spell disaster for Egypt and raises the possibility of armed conflict.

Equally Turkey's attempts to use the flow of the Tigris and the Eurphates rivers which both originate within its borders, could bring it into conflict with Syria, Iraq and Iran.

This is a book that makes you think and paints the world in a different light.

Barckley Sumner



Ethiopia's rivers mean it could become a major force in Africa

Getty Images

### 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)

# 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  
 Other (eg Unemployed member of the community, under 18, full time student, retired members or permanently disabled members who are not in paid employment)

Basic apprenticeship  
 Basic full time (more than 21 hours per week)  
 Basic part time (up to 21 hours per week)  
 Basic low pay

Date apprenticeship started \_\_\_\_\_  
Date apprenticeship due to end \_\_\_\_\_  
Date apprenticeship started \_\_\_\_\_  
Date apprenticeship due to end \_\_\_\_\_

Driver Care (a separate Driver Care application form will be sent to you)

## 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.uniteunion.org/equalities](http://www.uniteunion.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**

# JOIN THE CONSTRUCTION UNION

# JOIN UNITE TODAY!

Just scan the  
QR code follow  
the steps and you  
can be a Unite  
member in minutes

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