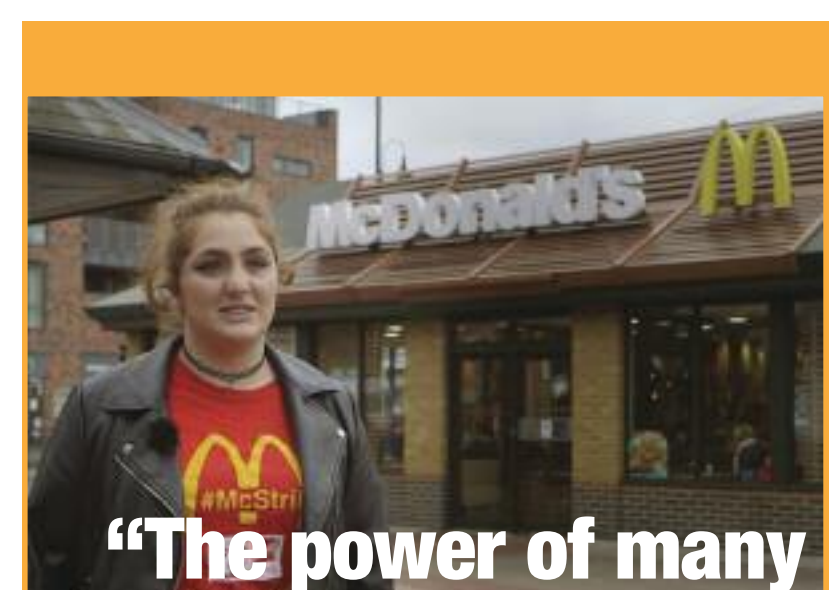
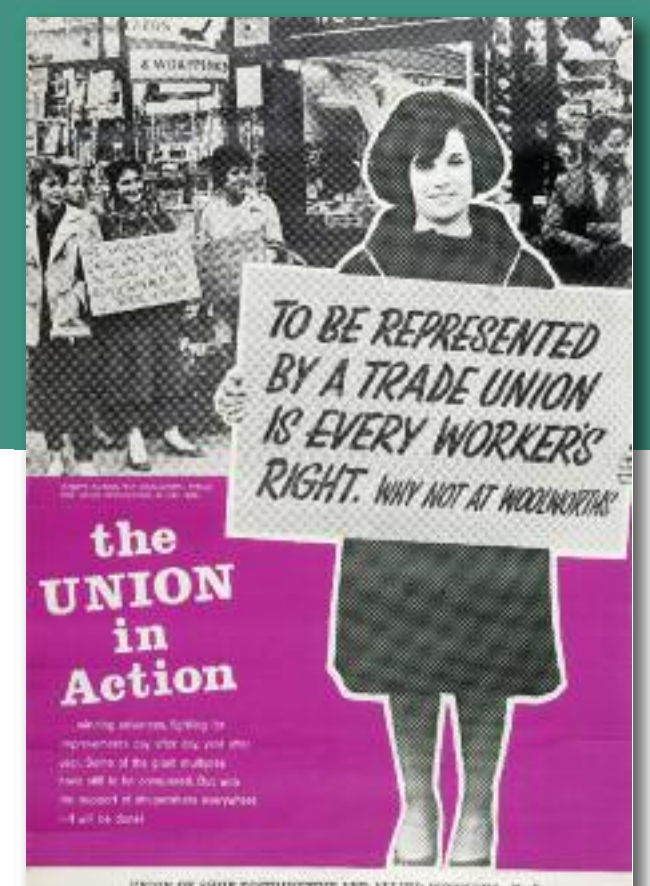
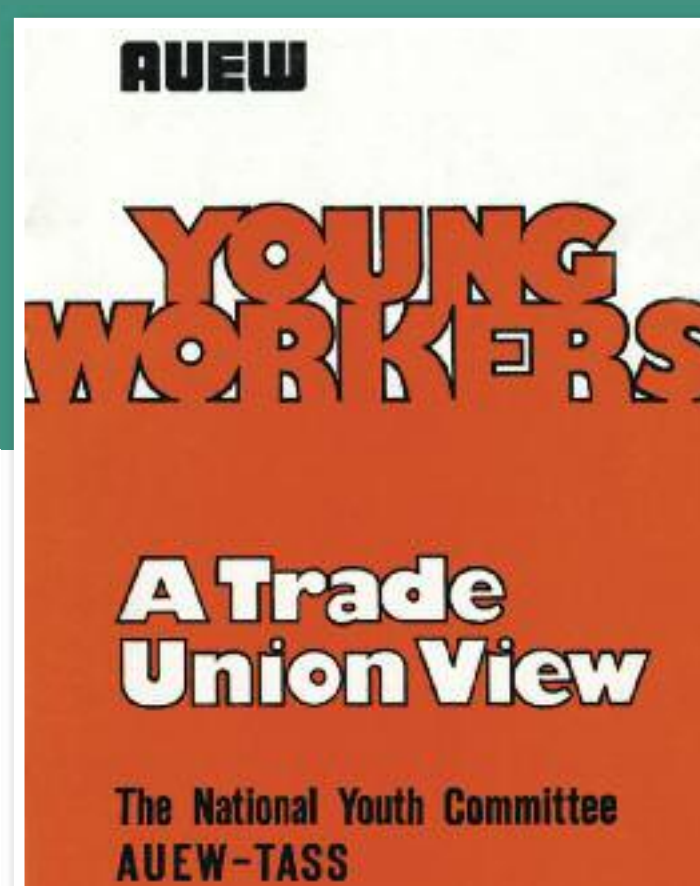
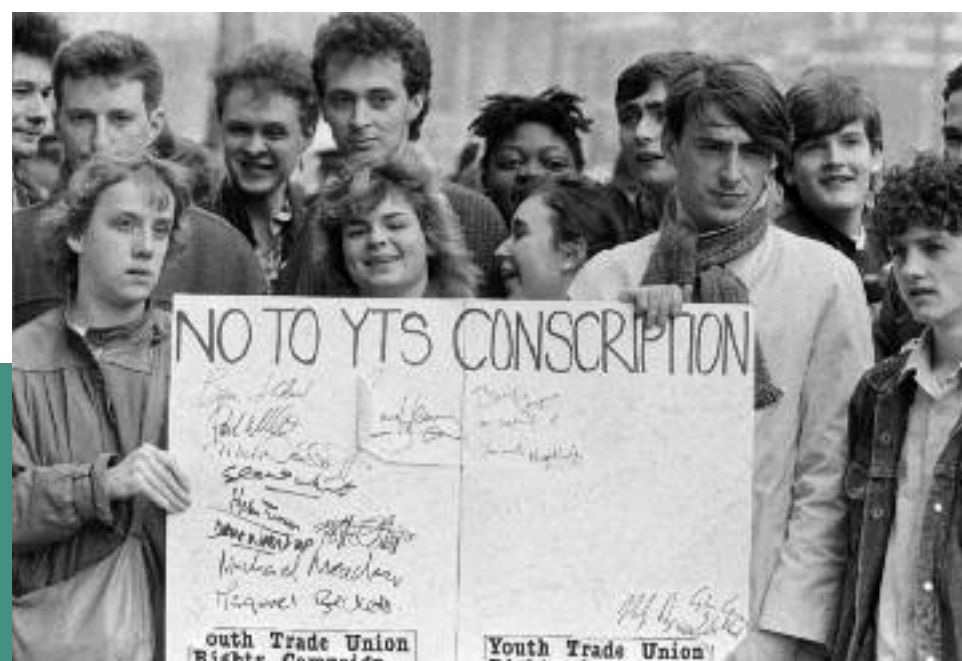


Young workers and unions – agents for change

Low pay, zero hours contracts, harassment and bullying in the workplace. Younger workers have often been at the sharp end of bad working practices and most in need of support from trade unions. This exhibition demonstrates the vulnerability of young workers through the last two hundred years and how they often took the lead to challenge these abuses and fight for change through their unions.

This exhibition is based on the contents of the TUC Library at London Metropolitan University, using its printed, manuscript and visual resources to explore the history and role of young workers and trade unions.

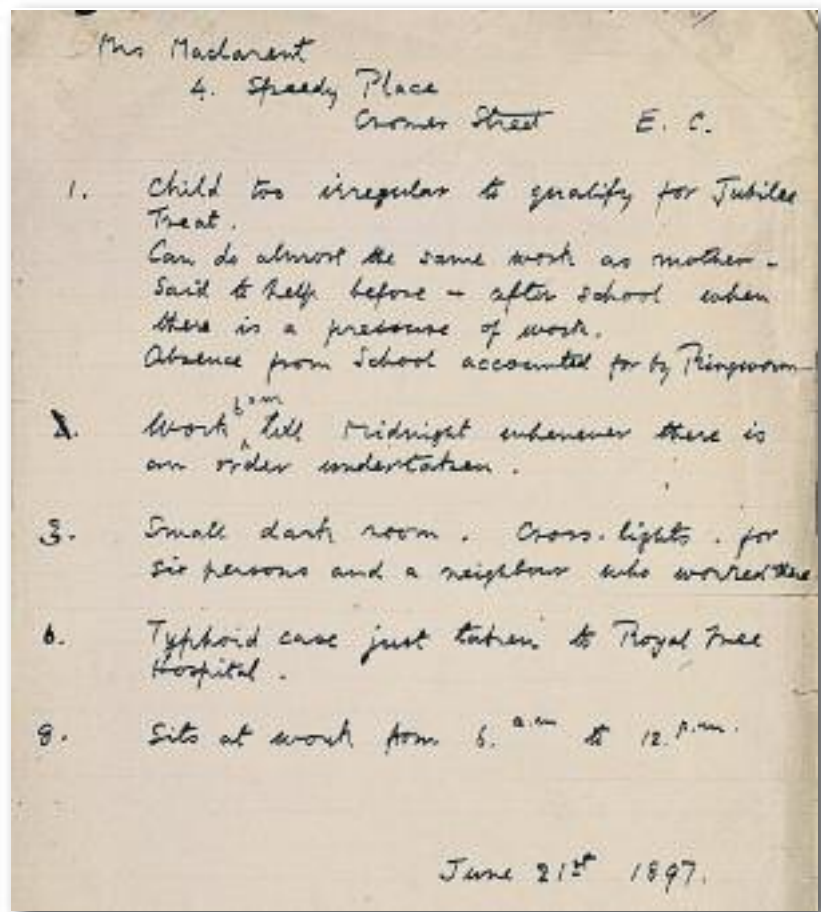


“The power of many together is more than the power of one.”

photo: © Mile 91

Shen Batmaz, fighting for change at MacDonalds, where workers went on strike in 2017 for a living wage, an end to zero hours contracts and union recognition.

Child labour

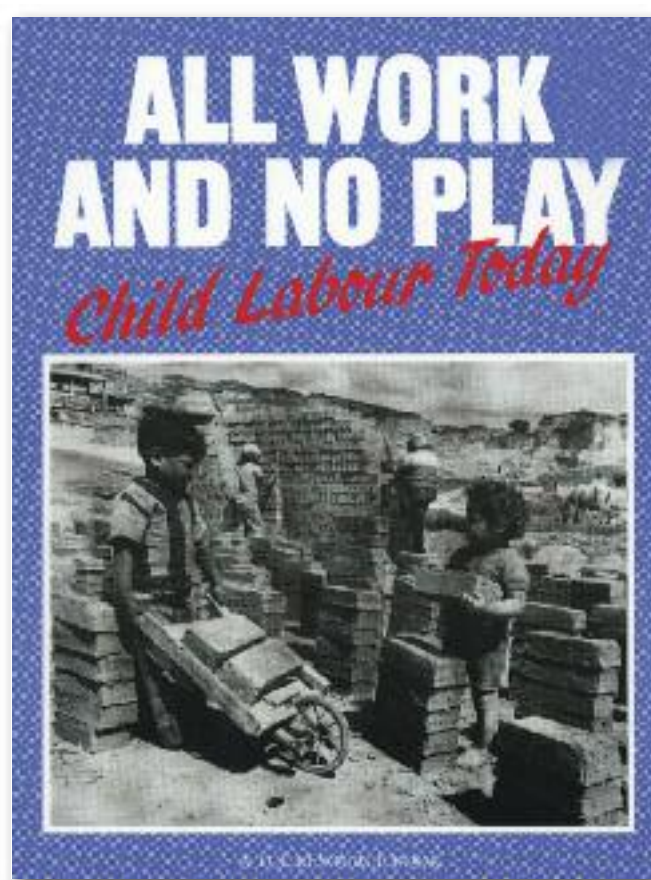


“Manufacturers usually employed children in factories from the age of eight or nine ... a few of them as young as five. The hours of work varied from fourteen to sixteen a day ... The factory owners allowed their workers to beat and otherwise maltreat the children.”

Friedrich Engels, 1844

The historian E P Thomson has called the exploitation of child labour in the 19th Century one of the most shameful events in our history. To the Victorians, child labour was cheap and inexhaustible. Poor families were forced off the land, either by enclosure laws or grinding poverty moved to the new industrial towns and introduced their children to the factories from the earliest age.

Various laws from the 1830s onwards helped to control the worst excesses of this employment but were passed in the face of fierce opposition from business interests. It was the widespread introduction of compulsory full-time schooling after 1870 which helped stop widespread child labour in Britain.



Clockwise from top left: An investigator's report into children's low wages and long hours in the artificial flower-making trade in London in 1897.

TUC poster 1942.

Despite national and international laws child labour continues to be a problem, the International Labour Office estimates there are 114 million child labourers worldwide below the age of 14.

Young miners, c1900.

House keeper and domestic staff c.1900. At the beginning of the 20th century most young women worked in domestic service.

Cardboard box makers working at home, 1906.

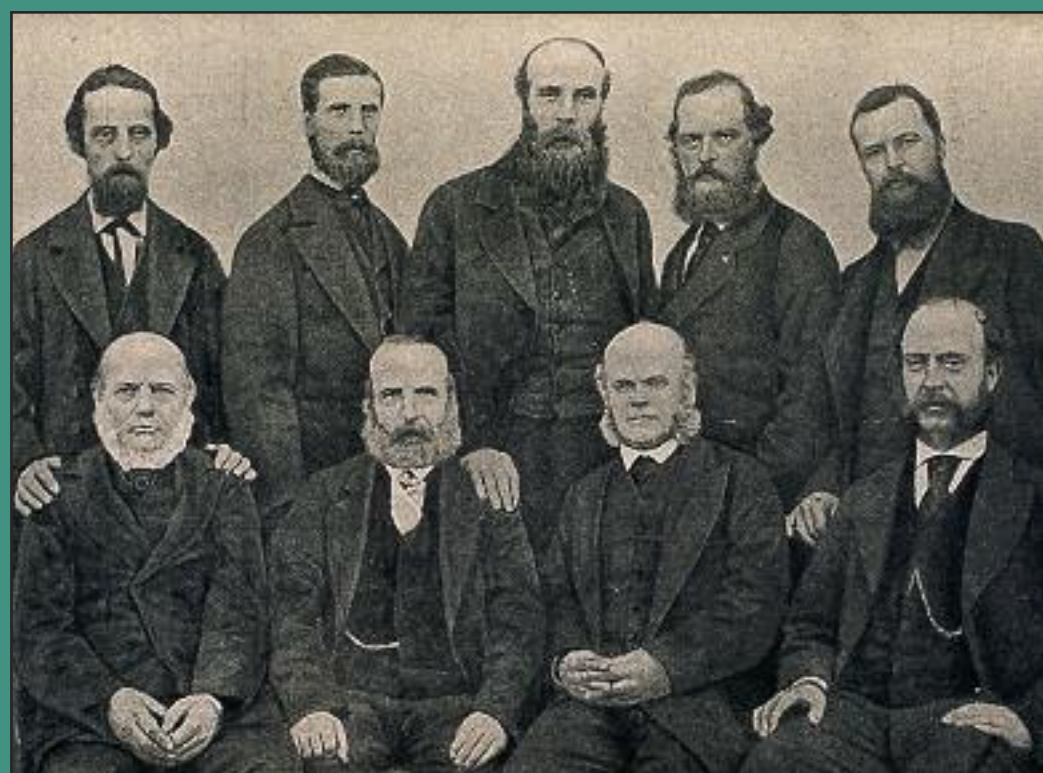
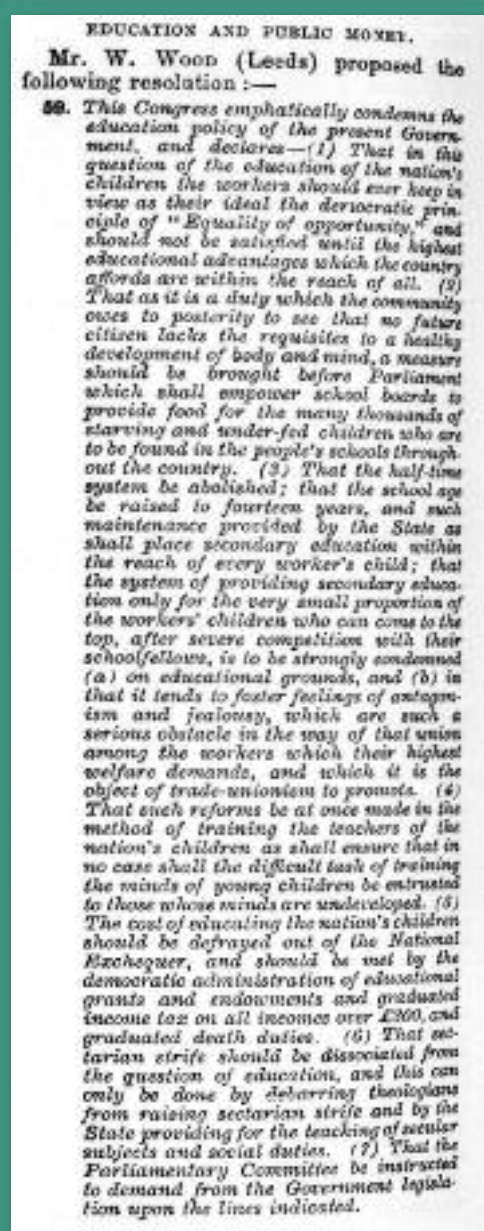
Children dropping firewood in the labour yard of the Manchester and Salford Wesleyan Mission c.1900.



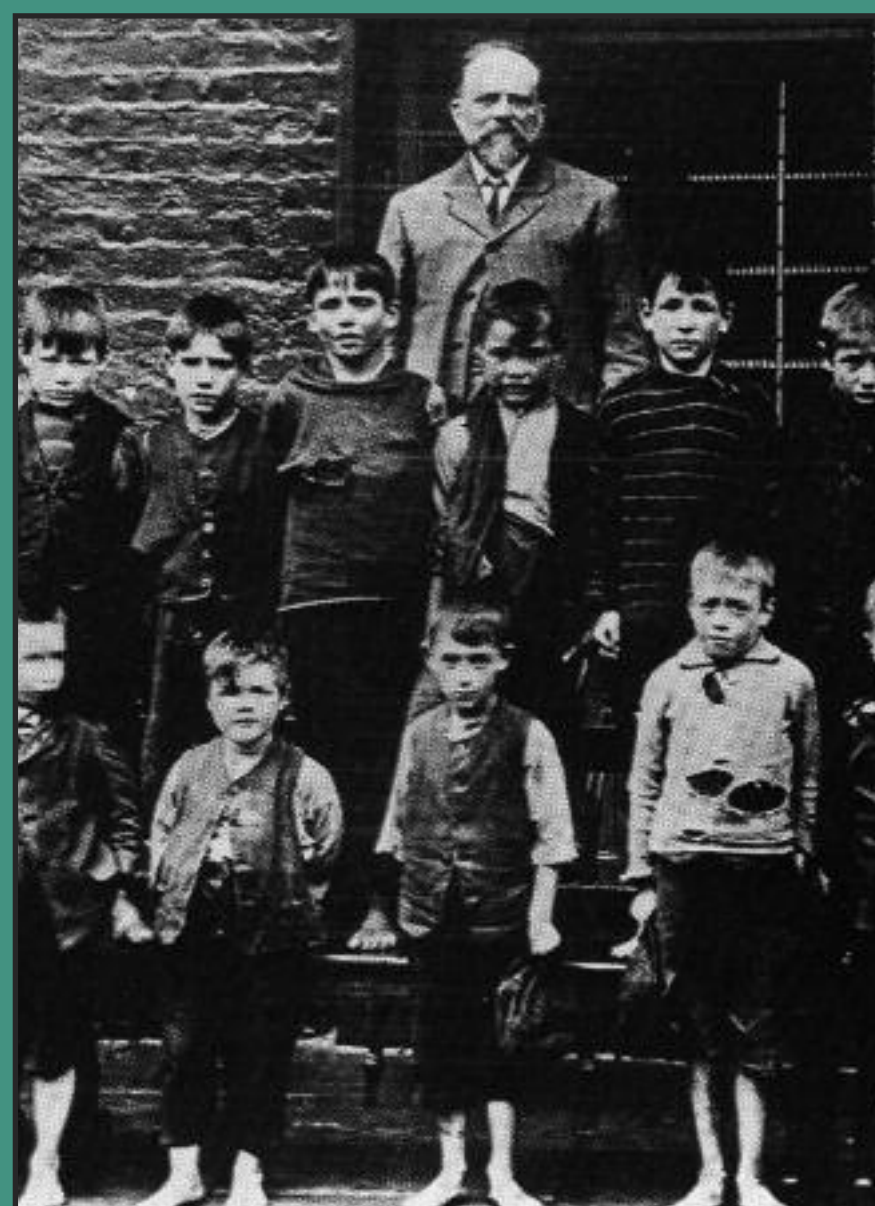
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Education for All!



Above: Early TUC leaders recognised the importance of education because they had little or no schooling themselves. Four of the men in this 1873 photo – George Potter, Henry Broadhurst, George Odger and George Shipton – became TUC Secretaries. In 1898, TUC Congress passed one of many progressive resolutions on education with demands including equal access to free and secular education, raising of the school age to 14, and school meals.



TUC policies on education have always focussed on equality of access, public funding and democratic accountability.

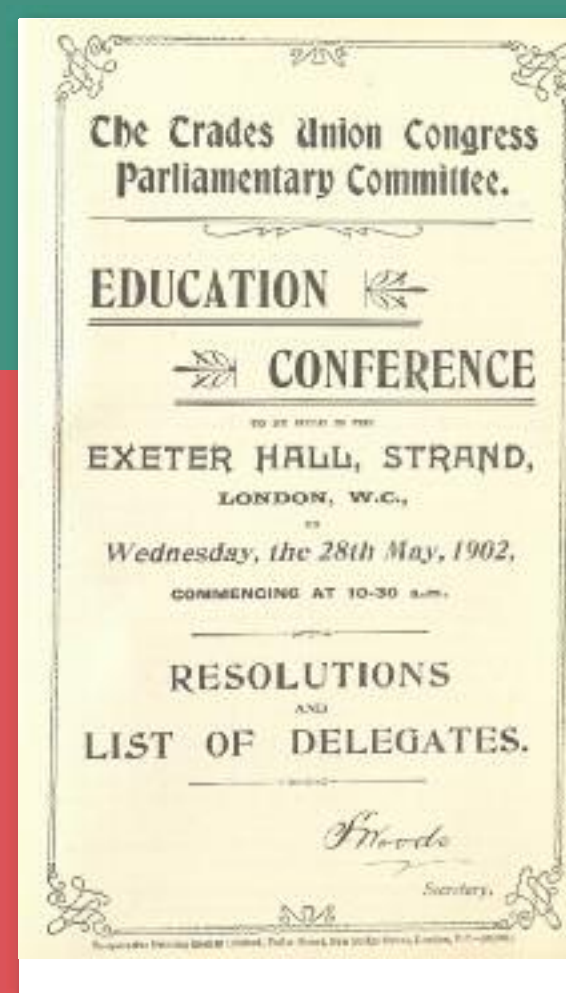
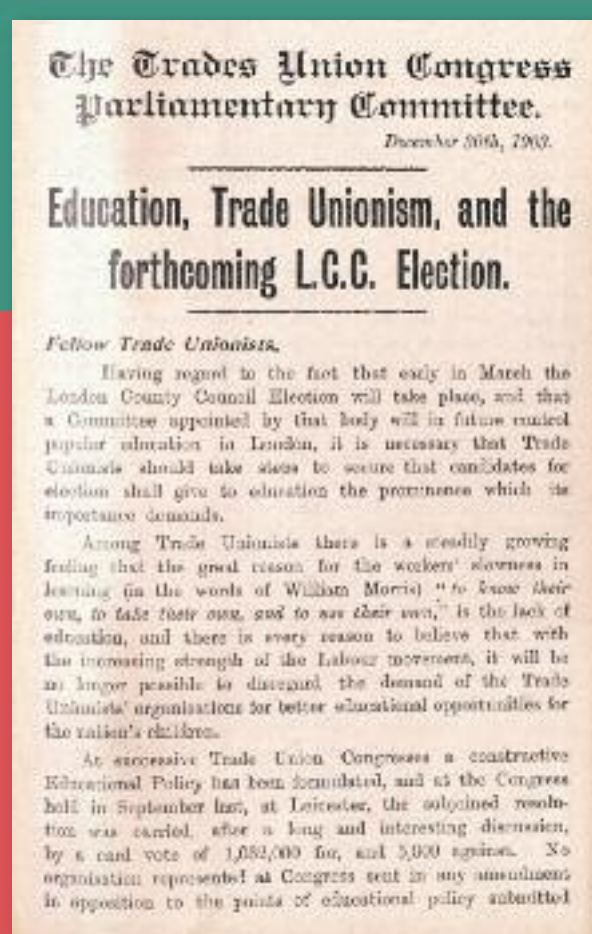
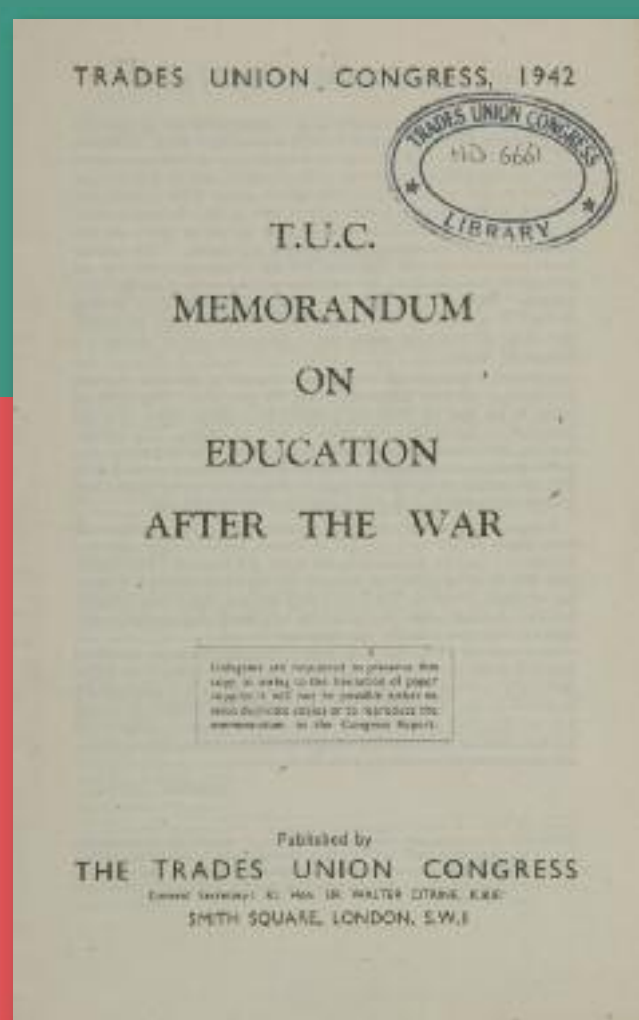
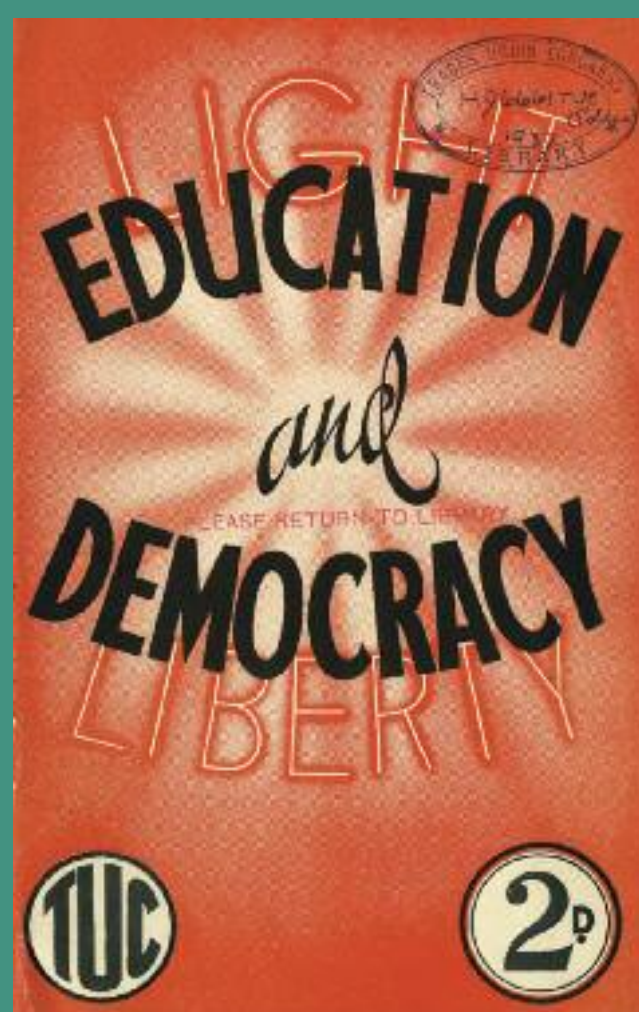
Top right and bottom right three pamphlets: Ragged schools were charitable organisations set up in the 1840s to provide free education – and often food – for destitute children. In 1870, an Education Act was passed to provide public funding for elementary education for working class children aged 5–13. It established School Boards, whose members were directly elected with trade union candidates campaigning for more democratic control of local schools. The Ragged Schools were gradually absorbed into the new Board Schools which continued until the 1902 Education Act replaced them with local education authorities.

Left: This 1937 TUC pamphlet is a statement of TUC principles and policies on education, but also reviews the TUC's own educational activities. At this time the TUC was campaigning for the raising of the school leaving age to 16, supported by maintenance allowances.

Below left: This 1942 TUC report outlines proposals for post-primary education after the war. It calls for the raising of the school leaving age to 16 years, free secondary education for all and an end to private schools. It also covers further education, youth services, access to universities, medical services and church schools.

Early campaigns were for representation on School Boards, free education, the raising of the school leaving age, school meals and medical inspections. In 1942, the TUC contributed a radical programme to post-war reconstruction plans in education.

The TUC continues to fight against the current problems in this vital service of under-funding, privatisation, and the recruitment and retention of skilled teachers, in order to build the education system that our children deserve.



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of work for good

Higher Education



Top left: Camberwell Art School protest against cuts 1984. Higher and further education was a core policy of the 1964 Labour Government. New universities were created, and some 30 polytechnics were set up to provide vocational courses. From the 1960s to 1998, when tuition fees were introduced, higher education in Britain was effectively free.

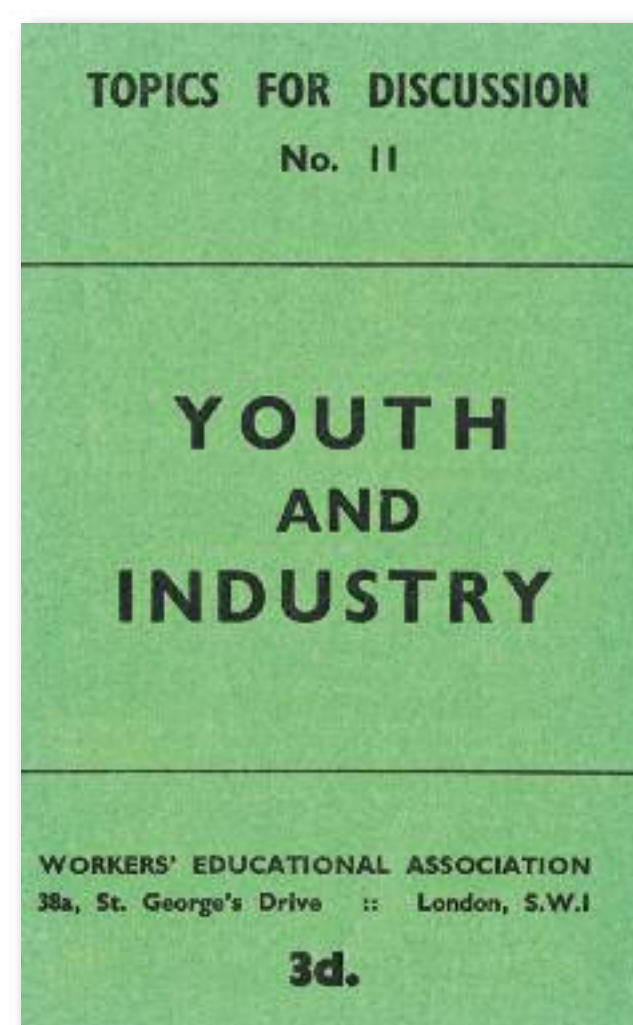
Above: 1984 Student protest against the closure of Westminster Hospital Medical School in a merger with other bodies. It is now part of Imperial College School of Medicine.

Over time, ideas about who should have access to higher education have changed. The call for free education all the way to university has long been regarded as an important part of ensuring that bright but disadvantaged young people can access further and higher education. Although policy support for that ideal has ebbed and flowed over the decades, young people themselves and education unions have consistently been some of the most passionate supporters of the idea; often sparking protests to ensure that good quality higher education is well funded and open to all.

These days, pressures to pay the cost of higher education partly explains why so many students are also workers. Early experiences of work often happen alongside education, and these employees are a very important source of staff for employers in jobs such as retail and hospitality. It also means that many students have a good idea about what work is like before they graduate which is something employers often emphasise. Unions are really important to help ensure that student workers are not treated unfairly.



Above: The University Socialist Federation, formed 1912 to link university Fabian societies, brought together a generation of young intellectuals who went on to play key roles in labour and radical movements, including G.D.H. Cole, Clifford Allen, R. Page Arnot, James Strachey, Rupert Brooke, Ellen Wilkinson and Hugh Dalton.



Left: This WEA pamphlet discusses aspects of the 1944 Education Act relating to teenagers: the raising of the school leaving age to 15, further education and vocational guidance. It argues that continuing education to at least 18 years would be of greater benefit than proposals to introduce National Service.

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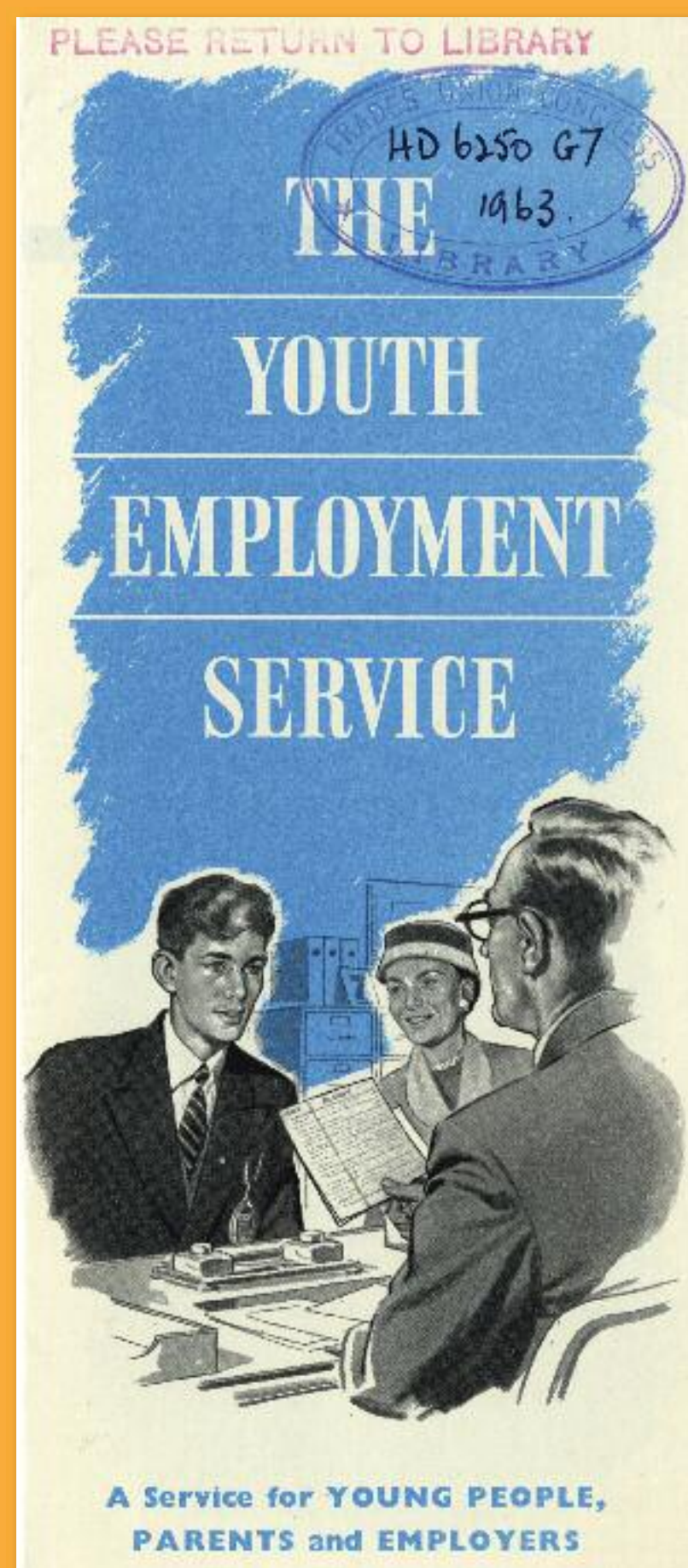
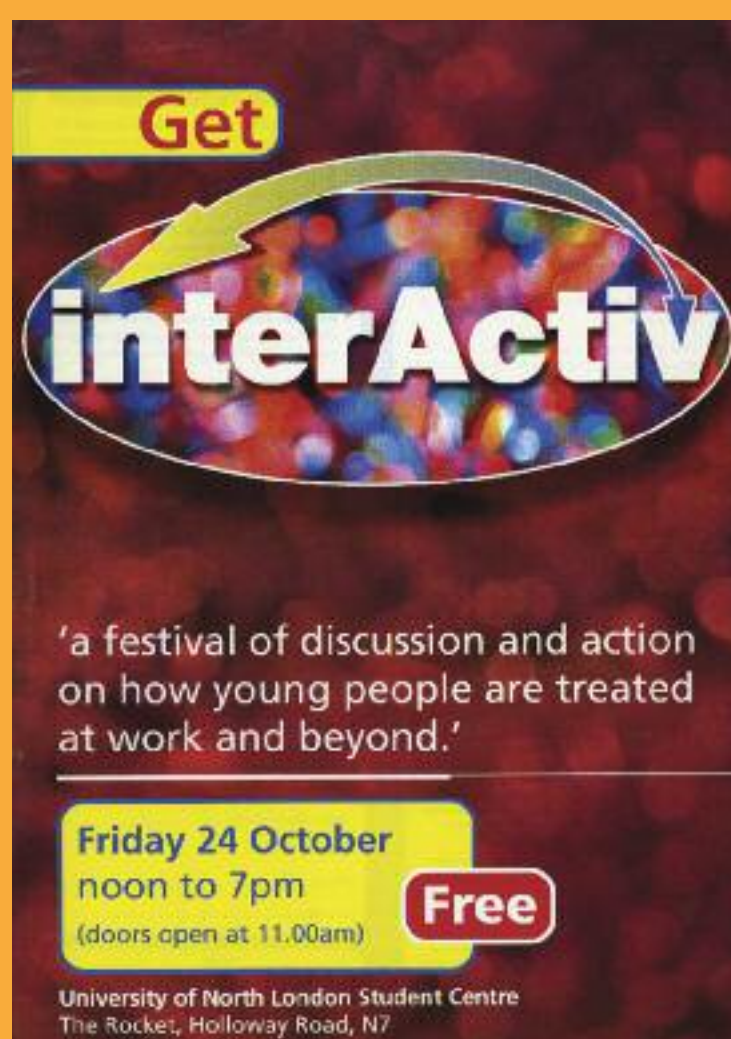
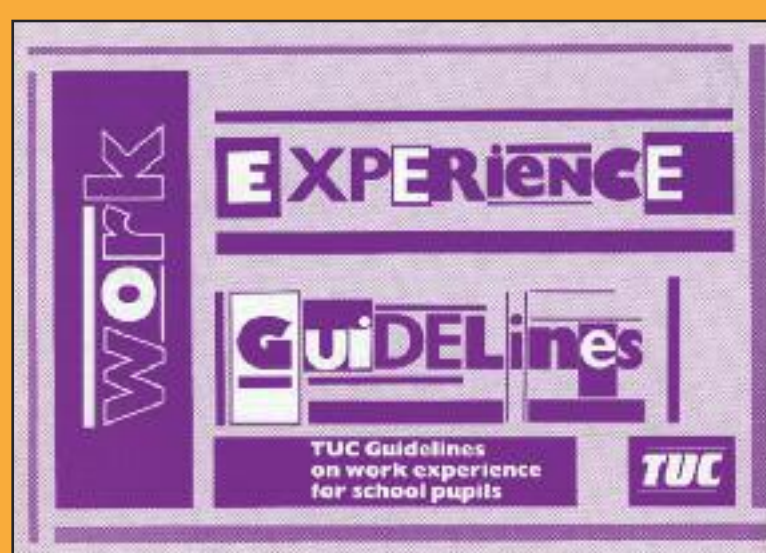
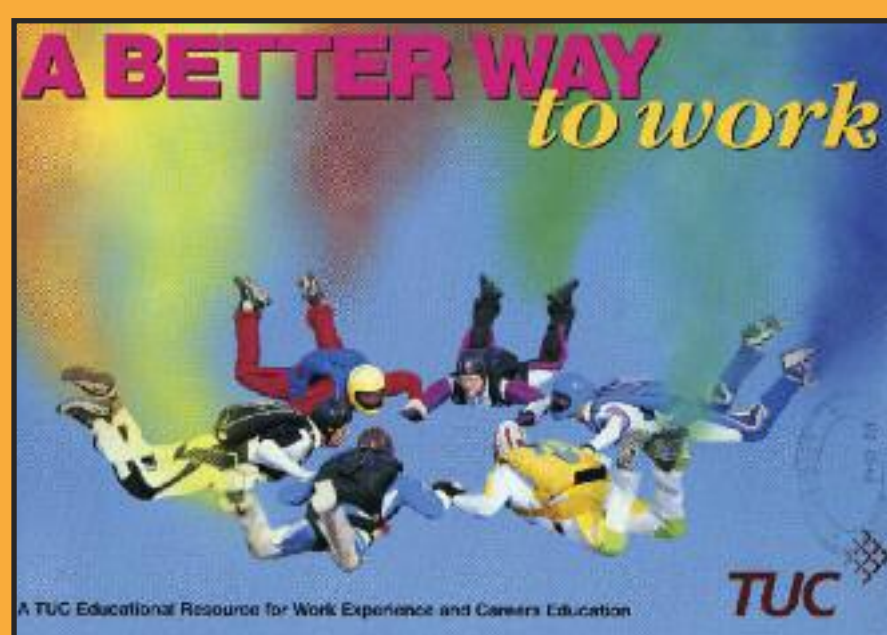
Learning about work



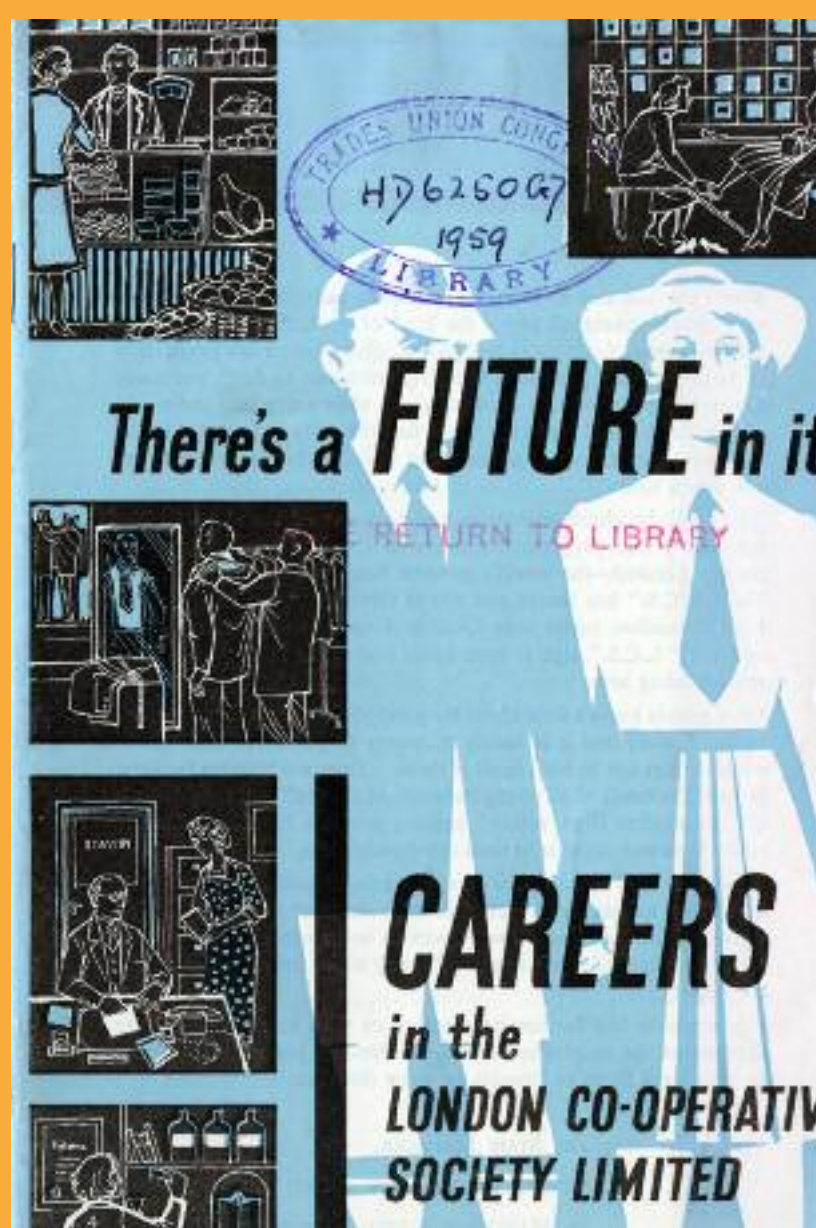
Above: TUC unionlearn stand at the 2019 Big Bang UK Young Scientists & Engineers Fair in Manchester providing information on apprentices' rights and how unions can support young people into work.

How we learn about work is a complicated business. Unions and the TUC have a role in preparing young people for the world of work. They provide support for young people through initiatives and events; providing skills workshops, information exchanges and debating spaces. They also raise awareness about what the future holds for young workers, their rights and responsibilities, health and safety and equal opportunities, and the role unions play in the workplace and the support they provide.

Unions are often central to making sure that any developments in training opportunities such as apprenticeships are good quality and that there are jobs available for these workers when they finish their schemes.



Above middle: interActiv Learning event organised by the TUC in 1997 for students at the University of North London, now London Metropolitan University. Credit London Metropolitan University.



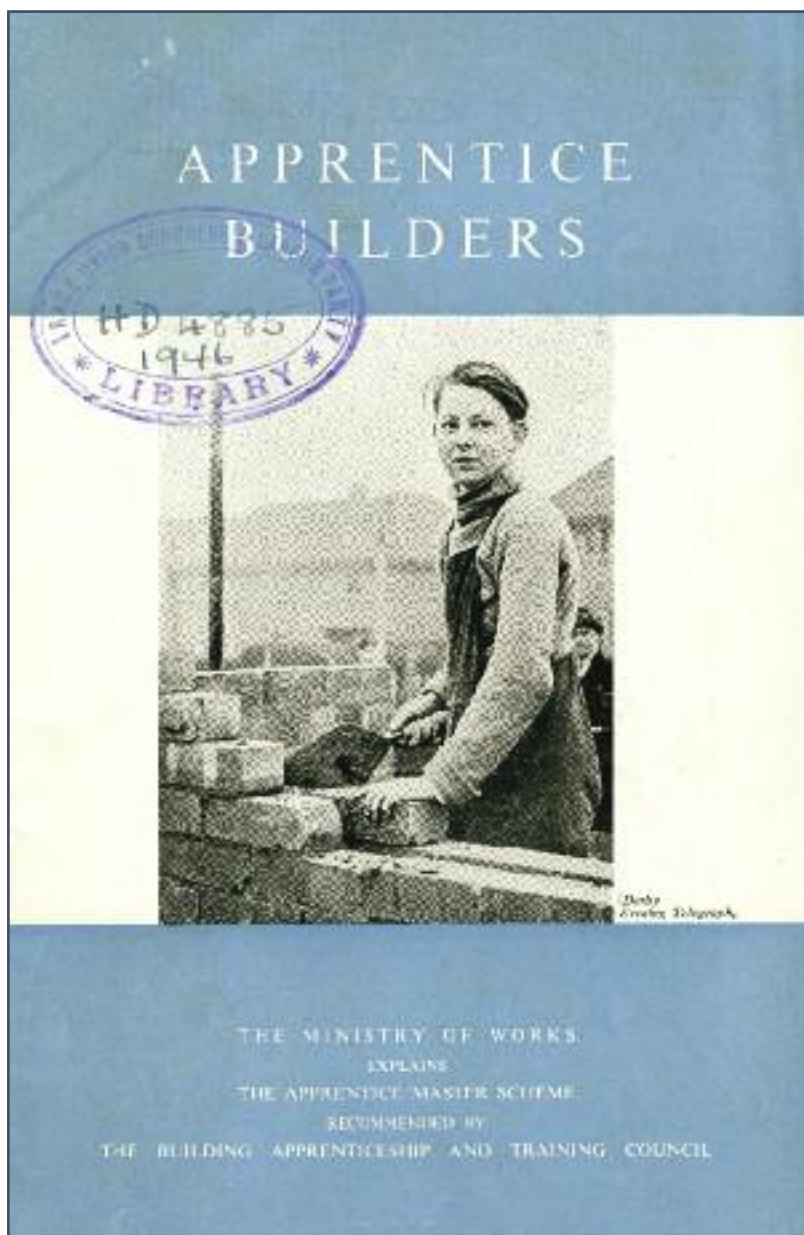
Left: National Coal Board recruitment leaflet, 1947.

Training: apprenticeships



In the past, access to training in a particular skill was usually through an apprenticeship agreement between an employer and the trainee.

Apprenticeships in Britain started back in the Middle Ages, but they spread from traditional trades such as construction, paper-making and printing to encompass emerging sectors such as engineering and shipbuilding from the 19th century, and retail, business and information technology in the 20th century.



The terms and conditions of the training offered by the employer to young apprentices were covered by legally binding documents called indentures. Apprenticeships lasted for 2 to 7 years, depending on the trade, after which the apprentice became a journeyman.

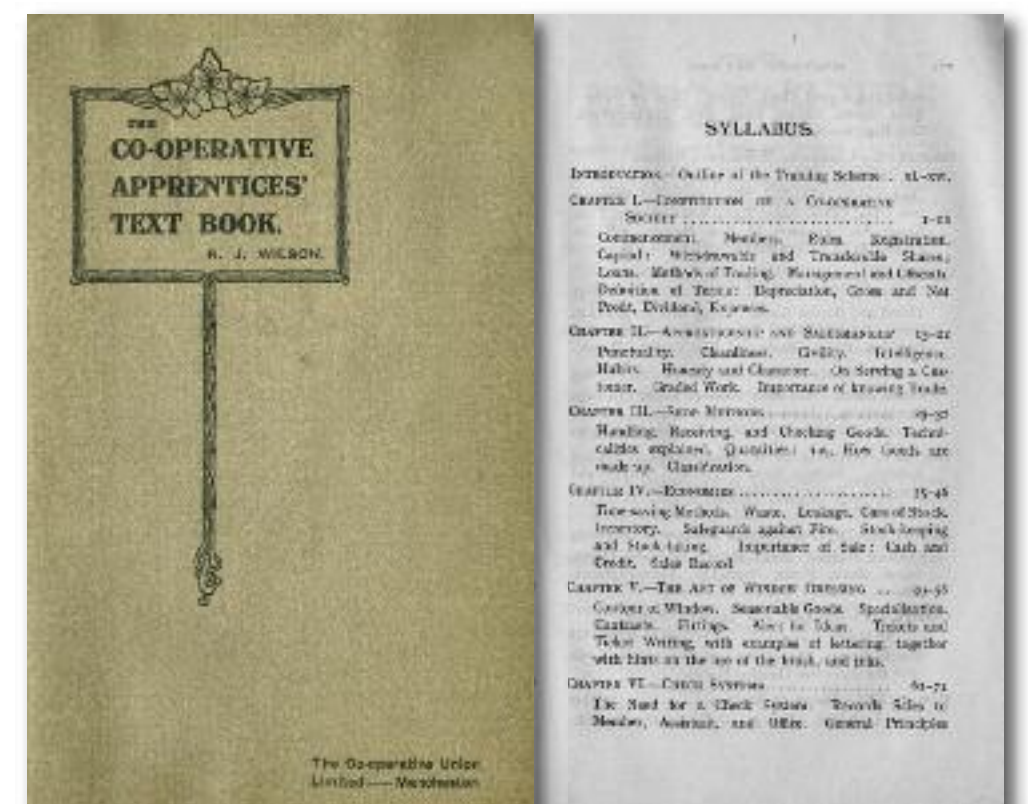
Both boys and girls were apprenticed though girls were offered a more limited range of occupations and were normally apprenticed to "housewifery". Poor children could have their apprenticeship to local families or businesses organised through the Parish – regardless of their parent's wishes.

By the mid-1960s, around 33% of male school leavers aged 15-17 entered some form of apprenticeship programme. However, from the 1970s the numbers engaged in apprenticeships began to decline across most occupational areas as various industries themselves declined.



Top: Apprentices in engineering in 1956 and in building 1946. After the Second World War, labour shortages and the urgent need to re-build after bomb damage resulted in this scheme to encourage young men to train as building workers.

Right: Page 1 of the training syllabus for apprentices in Cooperative stores, 1917. Notice especially Chapter II in the Syllabus.



Above: Ernest Coates in 1917 aged 13 starting work in a Durham colliery machine shop – and later, in 1924, completing his apprenticeship as a blacksmith and starting a 2 year term as 'improver'. Due to labour shortages during the First World War, the school leaving age was lowered to 13. Credit: Chris Coates.

Right and far right: Traditional apprenticeships were agreed in a formal document called an indenture, which bound the young person to an employer for several years. These two examples show Susanna Whiting's indenture in 'huswifery' 1714 and Stanley Bishop's with British Railways for the period 1958-1963.



Training: government schemes – TOPS & YOPS

Clockwise: The Industrial Training Act 1964 set up 21 training boards in different industries to address concerns about skills shortages and lack of implementation of new technologies.

A new apprenticeships scheme called “Modern Apprenticeships” was announced in 1993 and rolled out over the following two years. Modern Apprentices would count as employees and be paid a wage. There would be a written agreement between employers and apprentices. The scheme has been restructured since its introduction and after the 2010 election, Higher Apprenticeships were introduced (equivalent to foundation degrees or above).

Bottom right: Billy Bragg and Paul Weller support this protest against the Youth Training Scheme in February 1985. The Style Council’s 1985 song With Everything to Lose describes bogus training schemes.

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In the 1960s, politicians, policy makers and employers began to question the effectiveness of the existing model for apprenticeships. It was argued that they had not kept pace with technological and industrial change, the training took too long, and women were excluded from many sectors. A number of Government initiatives were introduced starting with the creation of 21 Industrial Training Boards in 1964 to check skills shortages in specific sectors.

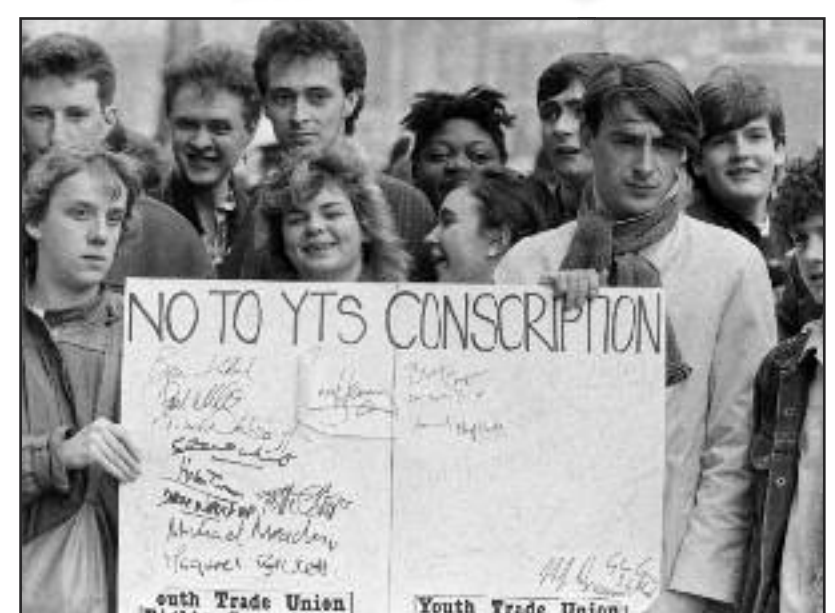
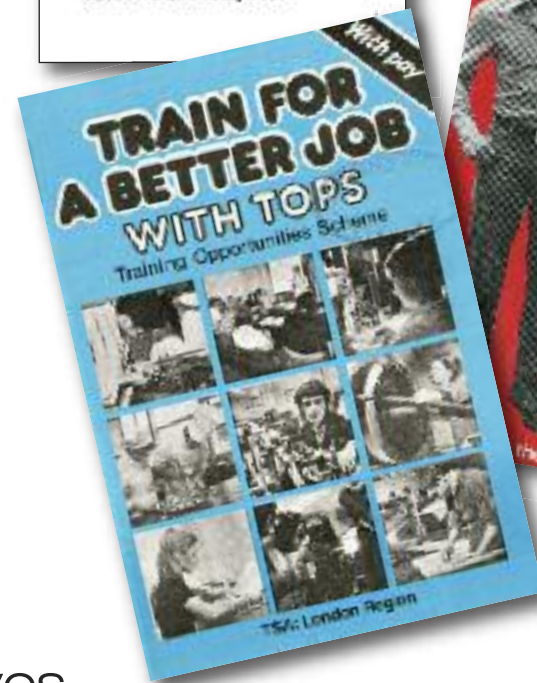
These were followed by:

- The Training Opportunities Scheme [TOPS] - introduced in 1972. By 1977 there were 500 different courses in Further Education Colleges or the Training Service Agency's own Skillcentres.
- The Youth Opportunities scheme [YOPS] - introduced by the Labour Government in 1978, in response to rapidly rising youth unemployment. It provided work experience only, although in 1982 a training element was added.
- The Youth Training Scheme (YTS)- introduced by the Conservative Government in 1983, was an on-the-job training course for school leavers aged 16 and 17.

These initiatives focussed on the young unemployed and it was argued that the new provision was of poor quality and more about cheap labour and massaging the unemployment statistics for political advantage.

A new “Modern Apprenticeships” scheme was launched in 1993 and was based on a written agreement between employers and apprentices. Apprentices would count as employees and be paid a wage and get time off for study.

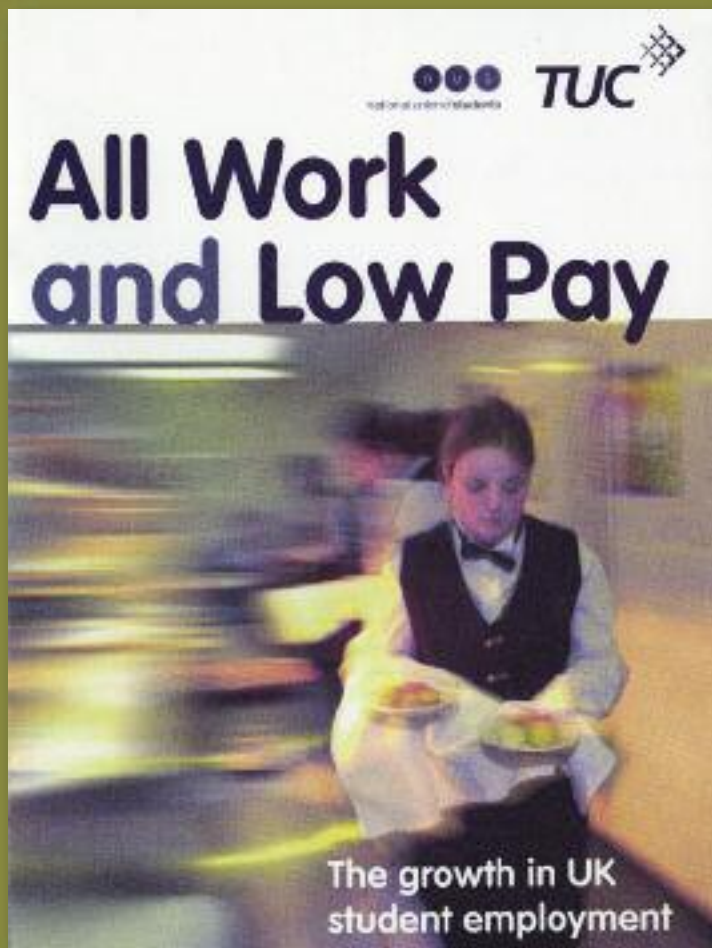
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Conditions at work – young, gifted and exploited



Low pay is an on-going problem for young people - getting paid less just because of your age. The TUC first called for a National Minimum Wage in 1986 and it was finally introduced in 1998 with age-related rates up to 25 years. The average 21-24 year-old worker is earning £800 a year less than over 25s. In 2019, the TUC is calling for all over-21s to move onto the full minimum wage rate and for that to be raised to £10 an hour.

Offensive remarks and bullying are often written off as banter and teasing – and young people subjected to such harassment need support - union safety representatives name it as one of their top five workplace hazards.

Many of the problems faced by young workers in the past such as low pay, lack of training opportunities, low quality jobs, precarious working conditions and a vulnerability to bullying and harassment continue into today. Young workers need trade unions more than ever. Unless they have the protection of a union – they have no voice in the workplace.

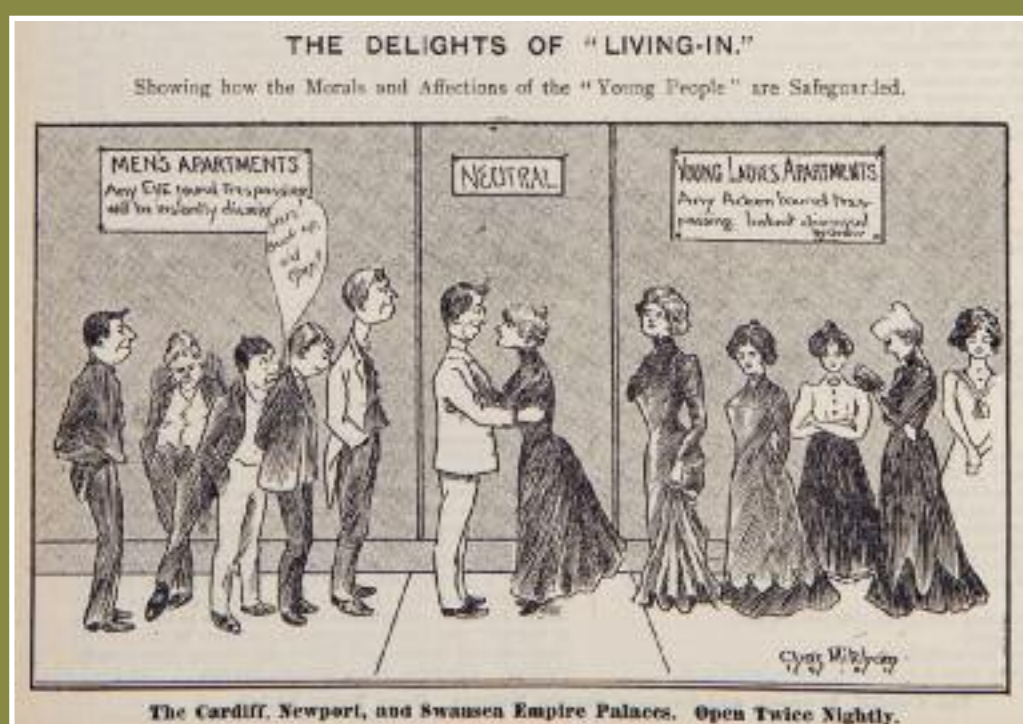


Top left: BECTU members on strike at the Duke of York cinema in Brighton, part of a nationwide strike for a living wage at Picturehouse cinemas.
Photo © Willy Donaghy
BECTU

Above: UNITE Fair Tips campaign.
Photo © Mark Thomas

Below right: This budget for a factory girl earning 9 shillings [c. £35] a week was drawn up by the Women's Trade Union League in 1910 to show the low standard of living experienced by young women workers.

Below left: This cartoon in The Shop Assistant magazine (March 1901), illustrates the concern for the moral well-being of young women in the 'living-in system' where the employer paid them partly in cash and partly by providing board and lodging. Rooms were shared by many and conditions were often cramped and unsafe.



301 18 101

A WOMAN'S BUDGET FOR A FORTNIGHT WHEN EARNING 9/- A WEEK.

Port of introduction room	42	42
Room for washing her clothes, which she does on	36	78
Room for Saturday afternoon	3	81
Cost	4	85
Light	5	90
Food	10	100
Drinks (10 shillings on the week)	1	101
Costs (10 shillings on the week)	10	111
Death Benefit Insurance	10	121
	121	121

WOMAN'S BUDGET

Room	6	42
Food (10 shillings)	1	43
Tea (10 shillings)	1	44
Light (10 shillings)	1	45
10 shillings on the week	1	46
Drinks	1	47
Costs (10 shillings on the week)	1	48
Death Benefit Insurance	1	49
10 shillings on the week	1	50
10 shillings on the week	1	51
10 shillings on the week	1	52
10 shillings on the week	1	53
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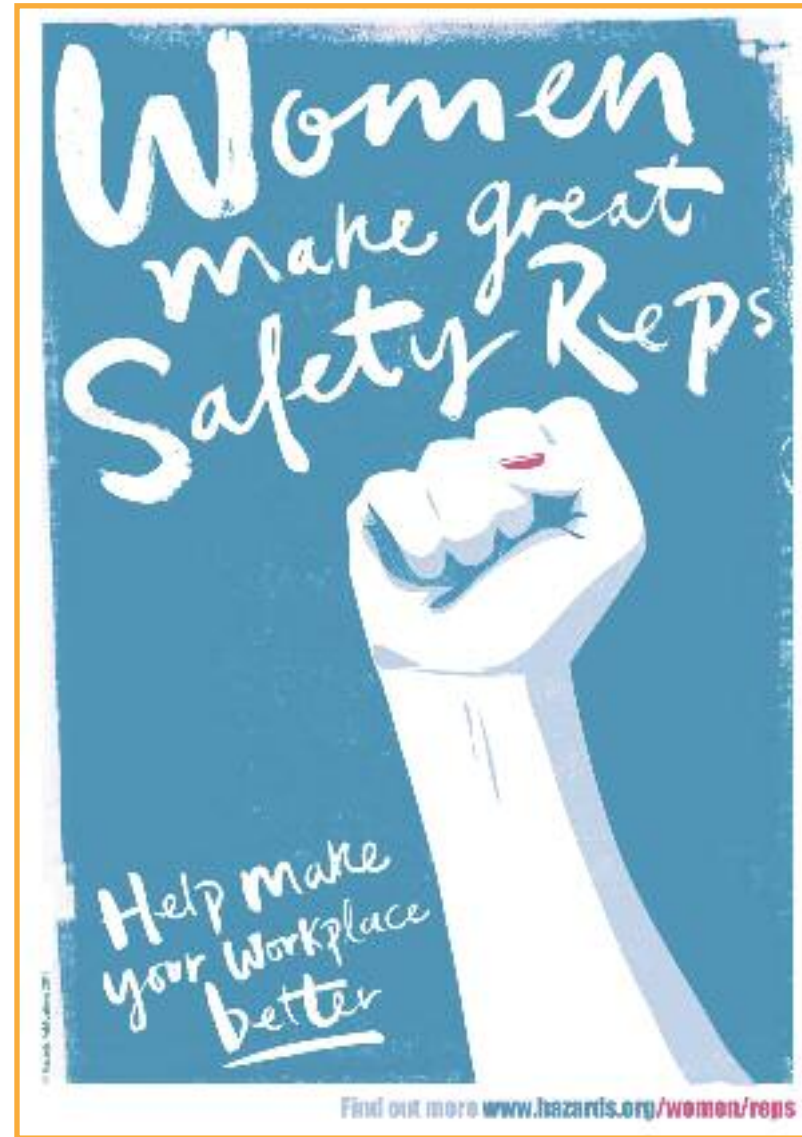
Health and Safety and everyday heroes

The struggle to achieve decent working conditions has a long history and young people have often been at the forefront having been put in the riskiest circumstances (because of ageism, sexism, their junior position or lack of experience).

Health and safety legislation was introduced from 1833 onwards – in mines, textiles, and then to other factories. Workers' compensation for injuries at work was introduced in the 1890s. The 20th century saw updating of Factory Acts and other laws, but the new industries and hazards emerging after World War 2 were not covered.

The TUC has always agitated to make protection more effective and, influenced by broader environmental campaigns, the right to take up their concerns at workplace level. A Royal Commission set up in 1968 led to the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, along with its associated Safety Representatives & Safety Committee Regulations.

European Union legislation has added to the framework of protection available today, but many workers still don't know or understand the hazards they face. The toll of death and illness is still immense and unions have much to do in educating people and agitating for improvements.



Above: Poster © Hazards Publications 2011.

Top right: Home Front poster 1941.

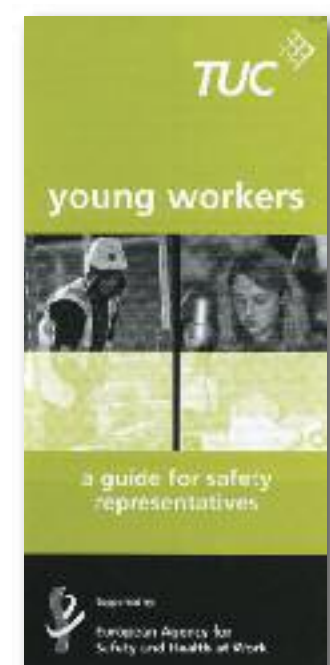
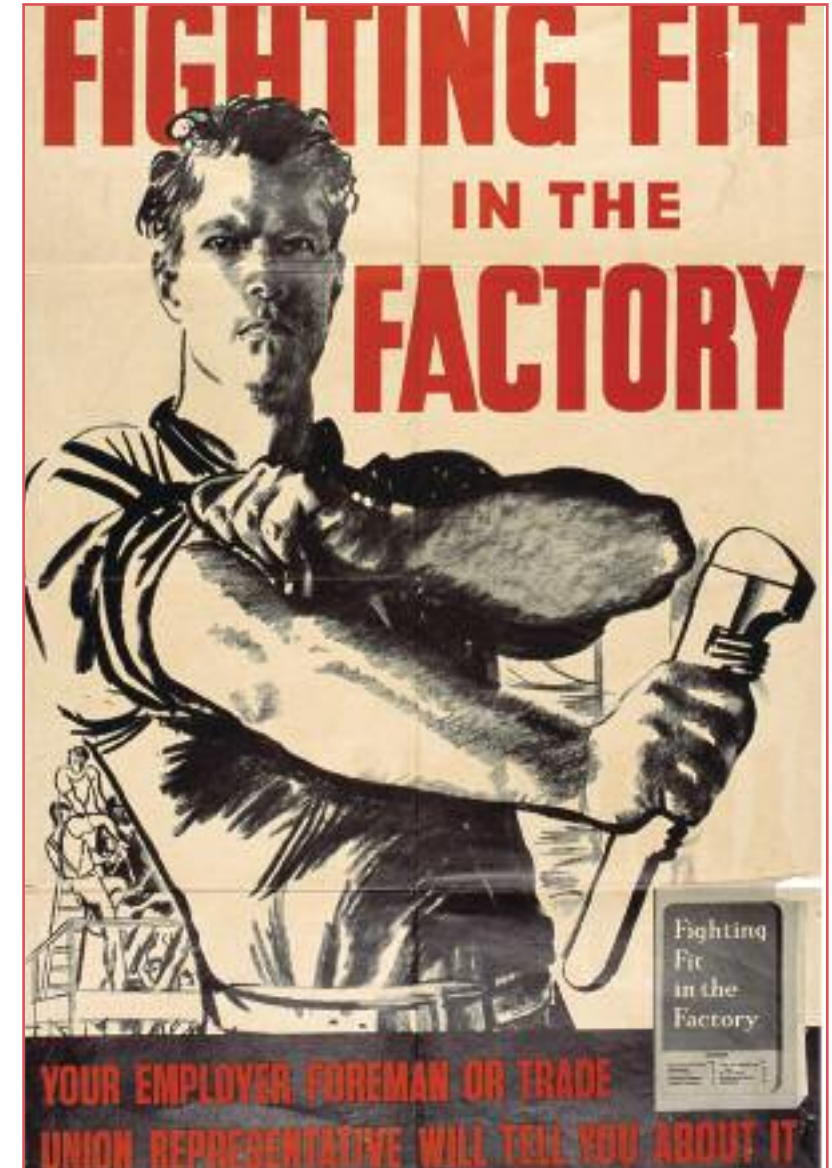
Right: The 'Daily Herald' Order of Industrial Heroism 1923-1964 recognised bravery at work and focused attention on workplace hazards – awarded here to docker, Arthur Flynn, in 1926. The medal was designed by Eric Gill.

Below: From the 1830s, the Government passed a series of Factory Acts to improve working conditions. This 1897 Factory Notice regulates the hours and other conditions of children and young people, specifying that children under 11 years cannot be employed and those aged 11-13 should attend school half-time.

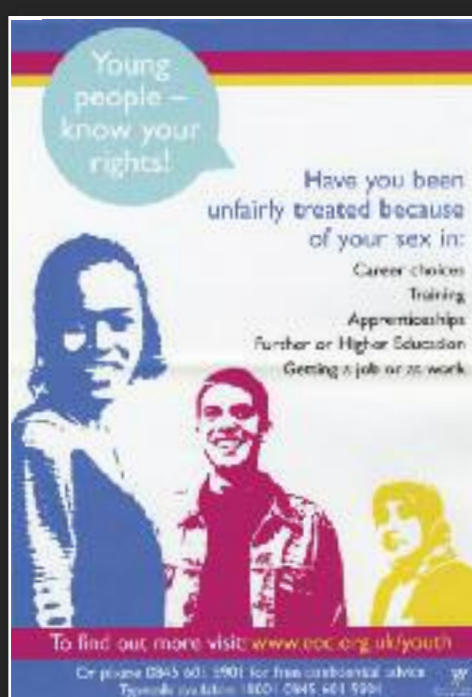
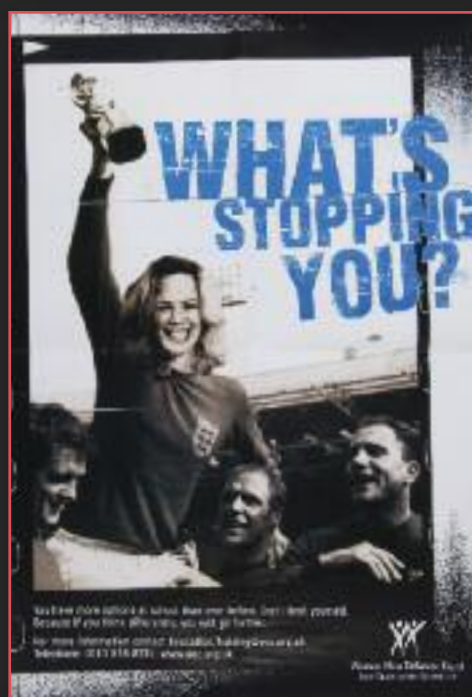


Right: 1899 medical report on a young Staffordshire pottery worker suffering from lead poisoning. This register kept as part of a Women's Trade Union League campaign against the use of lead.

Far right: Young match Workers at the Bryant and May factory, London, who went on strike in 1888 to protest against their low pay and unsafe working conditions.



A woman's place is in her union



Above: : Union poster 1968. © Unite the Union



Above: Equal Opportunities Commission poster 2007
EOC posters licensed under the Open Government Licence . v2.0.

In the mid-19th century, most women workers – except in weaving – were excluded from unions. In 1874, the Women's Protective and Provident League (later the Women's Trade Union League) was founded to encourage women to join existing unions where possible and to set up separate unions in women-dominated trades such as dressmaking, bookbinding and upholstery.

The League's secretary, Clementina Black, moved the first successful equal pay resolution at the 1888 TUC. The League was dissolved in 1921, when the TUC agreed to take on its functions.

From the 1920s, the TUC has organised an annual Women's Conference. In the inter-war years,

women in trade unions continued to campaign for equal pay and against the marriage bar in employment. Despite their contribution on the industrial Home Front during both World War 1 and World War 2, and the recommendation of a Royal Commission in 1946, women still had to wait until the 1960s to see equal pay legislation.

From the 1970s, women in unions have taken up many broader issues relating to their lives such as childcare, contraception and abortion, and women's health issues. In 2017, female employees were more likely to be a union member and 54.6% of union members were women.

Below: Corruganza Box Factory workers on strike 1908. In 1906, the Women's Trade Union League set up the National Federation of Women Workers as a militant general workers' union, campaigning for minimum wages for women in low paid trades. It claimed a peak membership of 100,000 in 1917.



Below: During World War 1, women were drafted into industry in large numbers and in August 1918, women bus and tram workers won a strike for the same increase in the war bonus as men workers © Rita Ferris-Taylor.



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Black & Asian workers in unions: challenging prejudice

In the past, trade unions not only failed to take up issues facing black and Asian workers, but were often hostile. Some black workers set up their own unions. In the 1930s, there was a Coloured Seamen's Union, fighting the colour bar on the Cardiff Docks, and also a Coloured Film Artists' Association. The Indian Workers Association formed in 1938 initially focussed on Indian independence, but from the 1950s more on union and anti-racist struggles in Britain.

Despite joining unions in large numbers, migrant workers (who were often the younger generations) arriving in the postwar period were not welcomed by unions, but stereotyped as a “problem” and a threat to the jobs of British workers. But the growing number of strikes against trade union racism by black workers and the rise of the far right in the 1970s shook the TUC into change.

In 1975, the TUC set up a Race Relations Advisory Committee. Campaigns against racism and racist organisations were initiated, educational materials and other publications were published, including a Black Workers Charter in 1981. Some unions agreed to varying forms of black self organisation in the early 1980s. An annual TUC Black Workers Conference was instituted and from 1994 there were reserved seats for black workers on the TUC General Council.

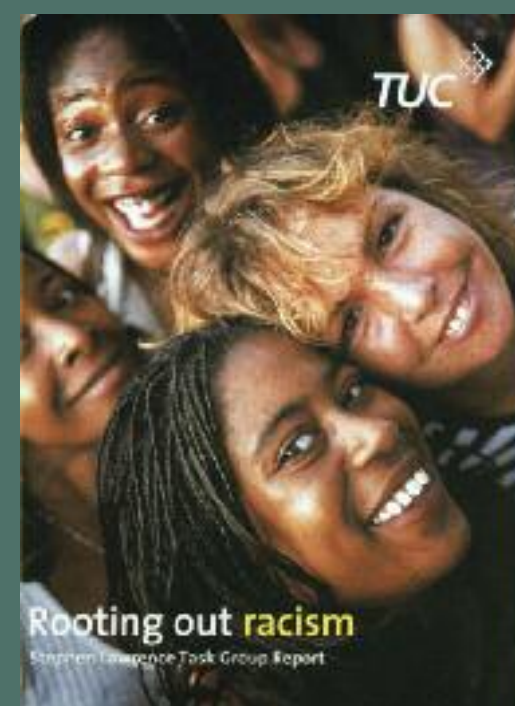
Today, the TUC recognises that young BAME workers are more likely to be trapped in zero-hours, agency or temp work. Unions can change this by putting BAME workers front and centre of the fight against insecure work to build a workplace where everyone is respected and valued.



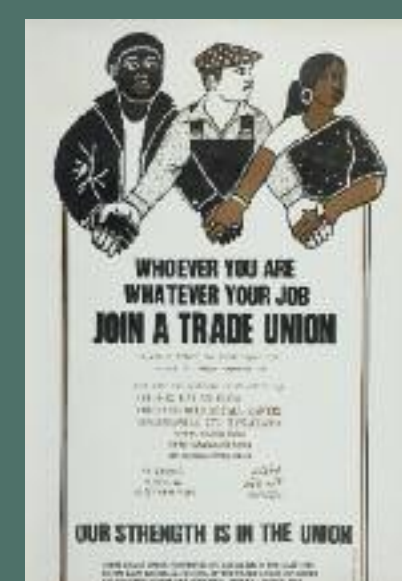
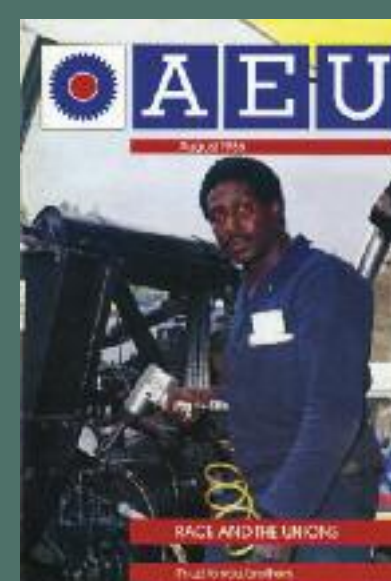
Above: The 1996 Respect Festival was a free summer music festival attended by over 80,000 people in Finsbury Park, London. It was organised by the TUC to support the Unite Against Racism campaign. The TUC also produced a CD cover of the Aretha Franklin classic hit, Respect, by the United Against Racism choir.

Below left: Report of the Stephen Lawrence Task Group report, 2000. Following the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence [a black teenager killed by a gang of white youths in 1993], the TUC set up a Task Group to examine institutional racism within the trade union movement.

Below right: Union recruitment leaflet distributed at the 1997 Unite Against Racism: Respect Music Festival held in Victoria Park, London.

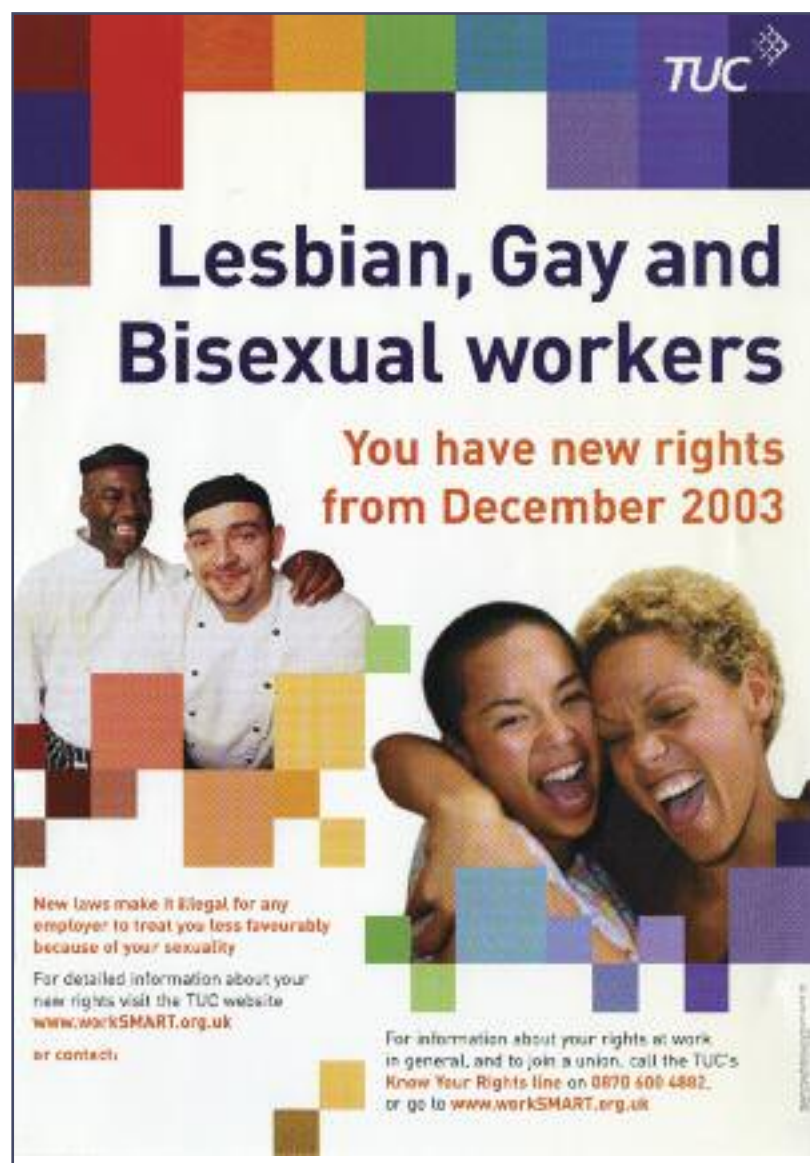


Left: The cover of this 1960 pamphlet shows members of the London Typographical Society in a printing composing room.
© Unite the Union



Left: AEU
© Unite the Union.

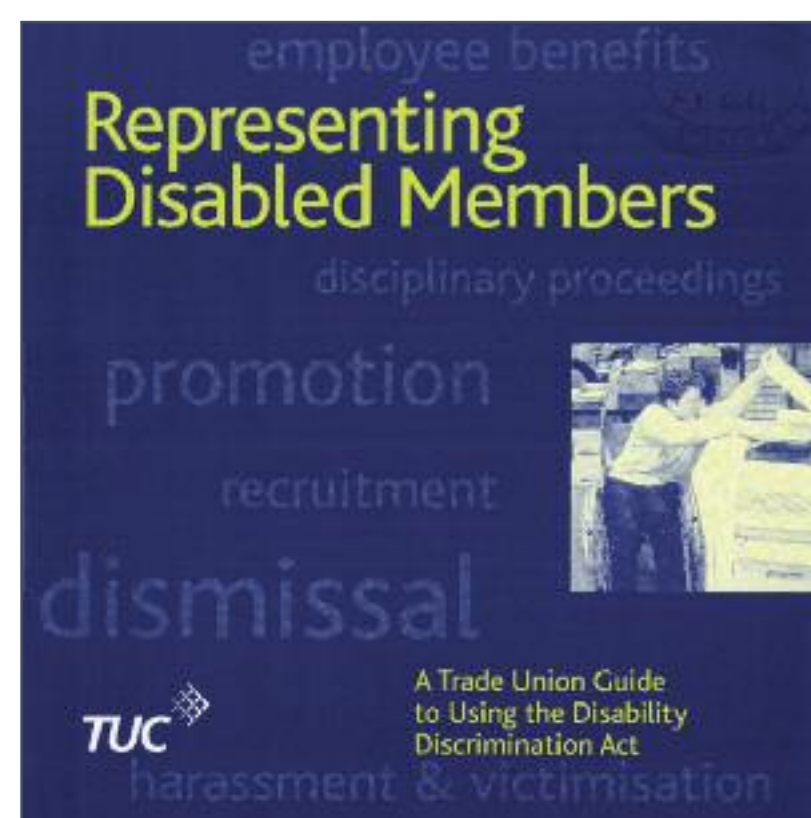
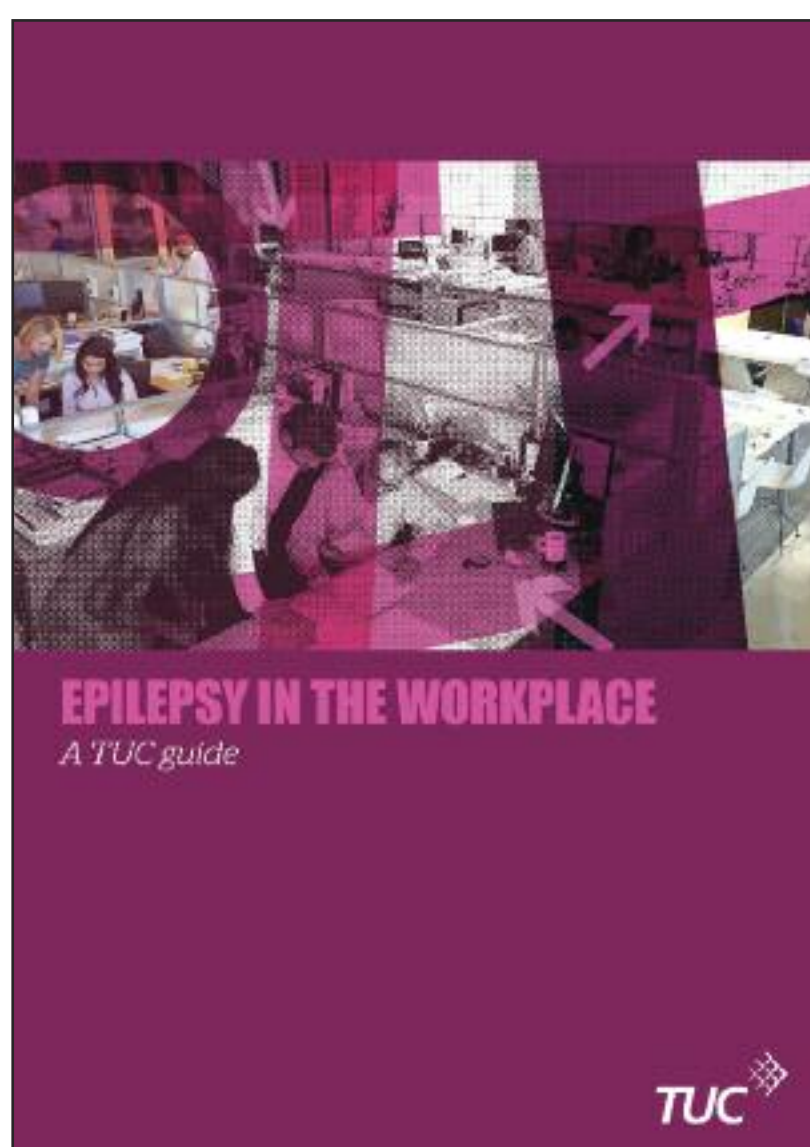
All equal



The TUC, as many other institutions, was slow to change its structures to encourage inclusivity until reacting to pressure from members themselves, often with the support of external activist groups. The National League of the Blind, later known as the National League of the Blind and Disabled, joined the TUC in 1902 to campaign for the state to take responsibility for employing blind people, for legislation to end employment discrimination, and for adequate benefits for those who could not work. After the League merged with another union in 2000, the TUC has held its own annual conferences for disabled workers and set up a Disabled Workers' Committee.

From the 1980s, many unions developed policies to protect members from discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and the 1985 TUC Congress passed a resolution accepting that lesbian and gay rights were a trade union issue. Since 1998, the TUC has had a Committee and organised annual conferences on lesbian and gay rights. From 2016, these became more inclusive when renamed LGBT+ Committee and Conference. In May 2019, the TUC published the first major report into LGBT sexual harassment at work in Great Britain.

TUC Regions organise more informal networks for disabled, LGTB+ Members and other groups to exchange information and share best practices.



Above: © LGSM 1919 (poster by Kevin Franklin).

Left: © ASLEF

Young Workers and Unions – a TUC Library exhibition

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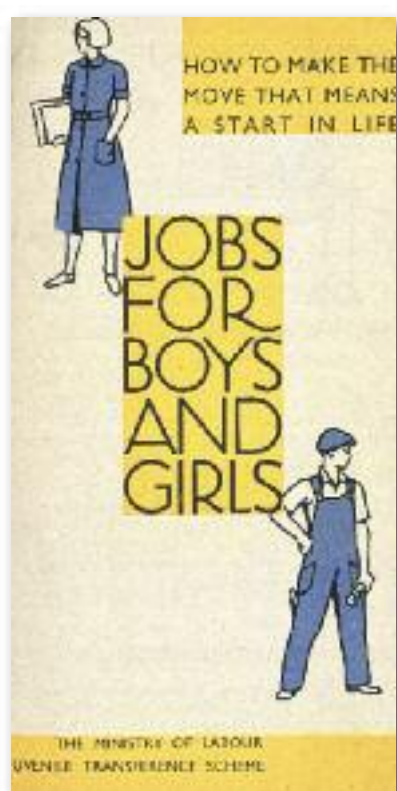
The right to work



Above: As part of its Jobs for Youth Campaign in November 1981, the TUC organised a Jobs Express train which travelled around Britain focusing attention on the demands of young unemployed people and students. The train had 450 young people on board by the time it reached London, where various events were organised.

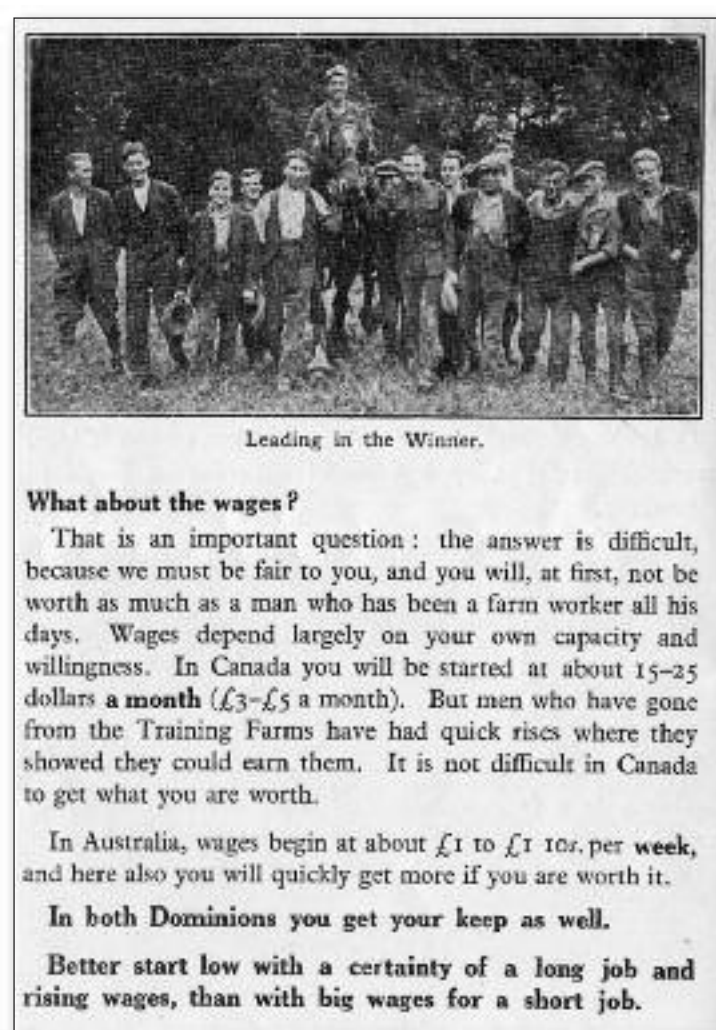
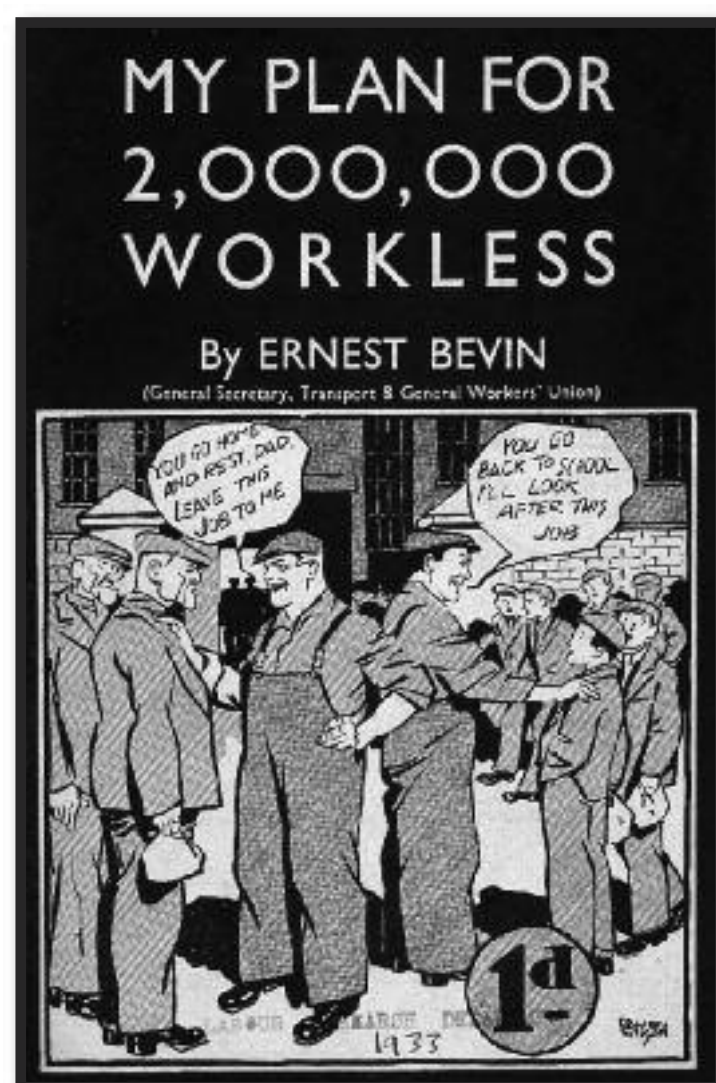
Above right: This 1933 pamphlet by Ernest Bevin proposes raising the school leaving age to 16 years and extending pensions to encourage retirement at 65, in order to reduce unemployment.

Right and below right: After the First World War, emigration to parts of the Empire was seen as a solution to the problem of large numbers of unemployed young people. These young women are sailing to Canada in 1930 to work as domestic servants and the boys are being trained for agricultural work in Canada or Australia.



Above and left: The Ministry of Labour introduced the juvenile transference scheme in 1928. Unemployed young people under the age of 18 were encouraged to move to areas where there was a demand for labour. Most of the movement was from Scotland, Wales and the North of England to the Midlands and the South East, particularly London. By 1936, c.34,000 young people had been transferred. The TUC opposed the transference of under 16s and was concerned that 16-18 year olds would be exploited as cheap labour.

Below: Youth Focus North East, 2018.



Above: Camp for unemployed young men at Ambergate, Derbyshire run by Grith Fyrd ['Peace Army'] in Old English] which was a radical alternative educational movement in the 1930s, allied to the Woodcraft Folk. The camps aimed to train young men in self-reliance, communal living and service.

The inter-war years saw high levels of unemployment and even fewer training opportunities. Camps for the unemployed, known as labour instructional centres, were more to do with morale and physical fitness than providing training. Between 1929 and 1938 almost 190,000 men were admitted to the camps, although most did not complete the course.

Unions were critical of other Government Schemes to deal with unemployed young people - emigration meant the loss of potential skills for developing new industries, and the transfer of young people from areas of high unemployment could damage family networks and possibly undercut wages elsewhere. The TUC argued that unemployment figures could be cut by progressive policies such as raising the school leaving age and improving pensions.

The recessions of the 1980s and 1990s saw youth unemployment rise again dramatically to 1.25 million.

The labour market changed and the 1970s norm of young people leaving school and immediately finding a job was over.



The causes of unemployment and how they might be combatted has been a recurring theme throughout the TUC's history. Today, the TUC is campaigning against the replacement of permanent jobs with insecure alternatives - like zero hours or short-hours contracts, working as a temp or through an agency.

Young Workers and Unions – a TUC Library exhibition

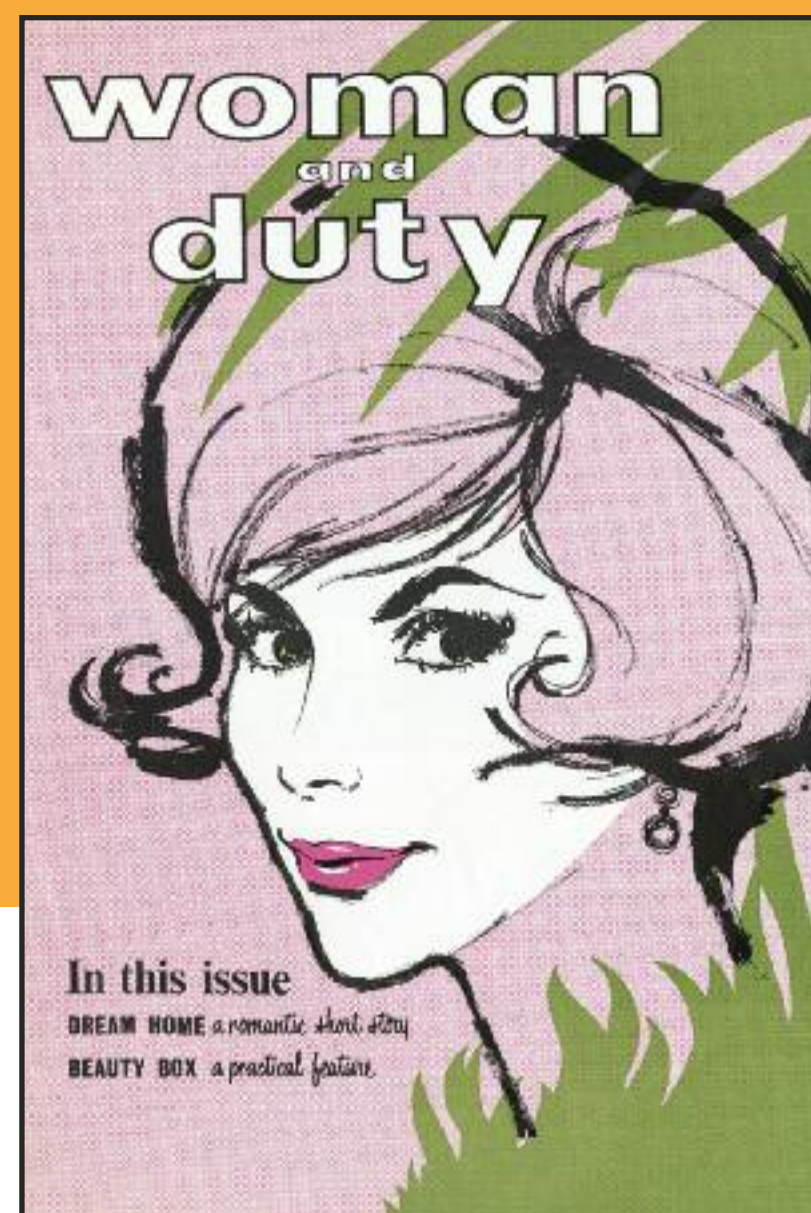
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Join a union now! How unions recruit young people



Top row: Some of the recruitment publicity produced to encourage young women to join unions in the past has lost its appeal...



The high unemployment of the 1920s and '30s led to a decline in trade union membership - from around 6.5 millions in 1920 to its lowest point in the inter-war years of 3.2 millions in 1934. Individual unions and the TUC launched mass recruitment campaigns, particularly aimed at women and young workers.

Union membership rose again steadily from WW2, reaching a peak of 13 millions in 1979, but de-industrialisation, unemployment and a hostile political climate in the 1980s affected union strength and new recruitment tactics were required. The 1981 Jobs for Youth and the 1990 Union Yes! Campaigns put the spotlight on young workers' concerns – and took the recruitment message into the areas where the new jobs were being created – and TUC organised music festivals and other events have attracted young people to come and hear the union message. In the 21st century, unions have had to overhaul their communications strategies yet again to find ways to use online resources and social media to reach a new generation.

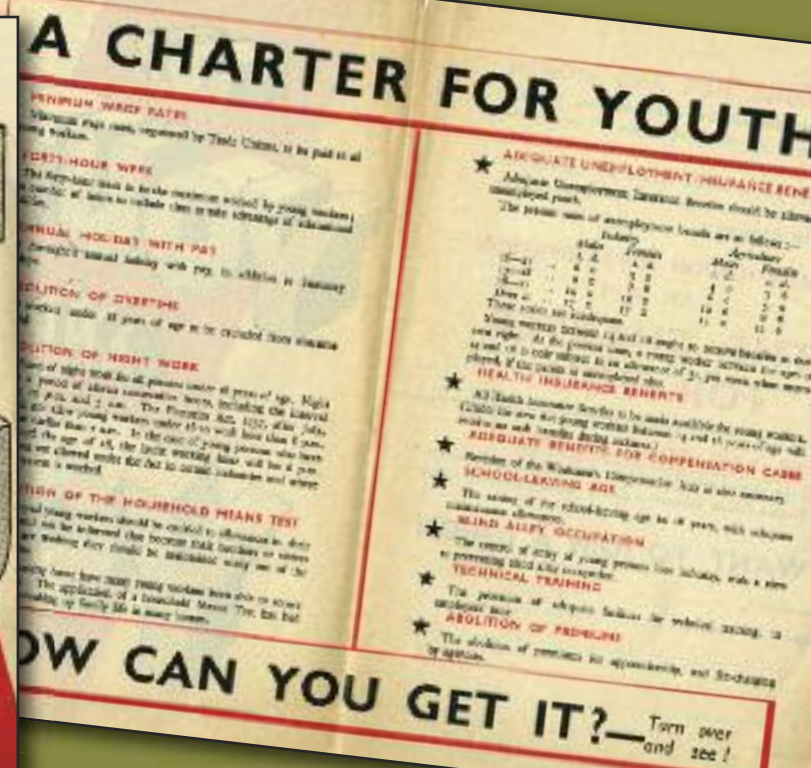
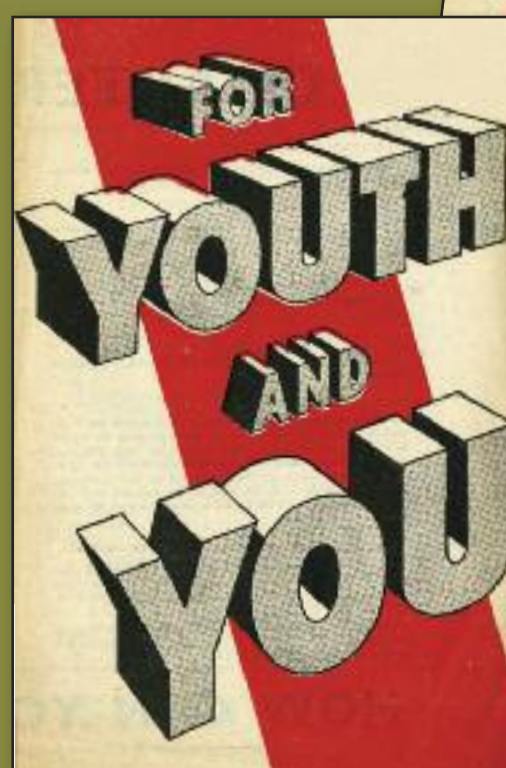
Far right: In 1960, trade unions in West London organised a week of political and social events to recruit young workers.

Right: © Unite the Union 1964.



Right: TUC 1989.

Below: A Charter for Youth, TUC 1938.



Young Workers and Unions – a TUC Library exhibition

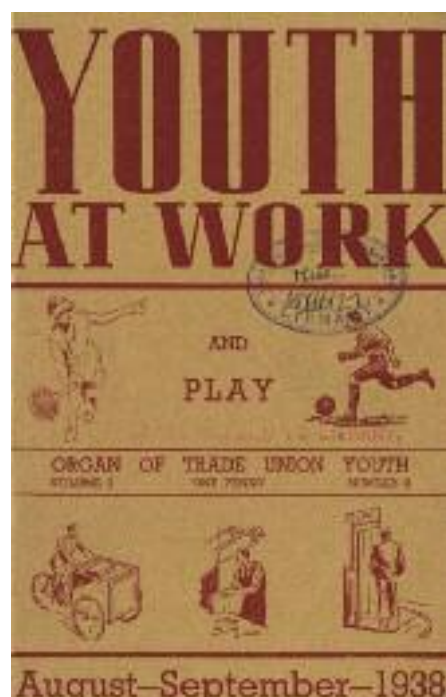
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Count me in! Representing young people



Far left and left: Youth magazines produced by the National Union of Clerks in the 1930s.

Right: Letter from young union activists in 1969, calling for the TUC to convene a conference for young members, and a report in the TUC Broadsheet Labour from the first Youth Conference which was held in Congress House, London in February 1974.



The TUC was rather slow to provide representation for young people in its own structure. In 1936, a young Congress delegate praised initiatives by the National Union of Clerks, the London Trades Council and other unions in giving some autonomy to youth organisation, but complained that the TUC itself was not doing enough. He proposed a TUC Committee where young members could discuss solutions themselves to the problems they faced at work. The response was sympathetic – but said there was “really no need” for special structures.

The Amalgamated Engineering Union took a lead in setting up an annual Youth Conference in 1944, but it was not until 1974 that the TUC called its own Youth Conference, which continues to meet annually in March. Subsequent calls for a youth advisory committee to the General Council were rejected – but finally the establishment of a TUC Youth Forum was given official backing in 1987 [from 2013 the Young Workers Forum] was set up. As well as more formal delegate based meetings, Open Forums are held in the regions to which all young workers, regardless of union membership, are invited – a chance for a broader group of young workers to engage with the TUC.

Since 1970, the TUC has presented a Congress Award for Youth for outstanding contributions to union activities and from 2014, the Forum presents a TUC Youth Campaign Award for innovative and effective campaigning by young trade unionists. The TUC celebrates Young Workers Month in November.



Above: TUC Youth Award finalists 1972: winner Maureen Dodds, Tobacco Workers' Union [4th from left]. Victor Feather, TUC General Secretary [2nd from right].

Below: TUC Young Workers Conference, February 1981.



Solidarity! Young people as agents of change

Young activists have always provided energy and leadership within the labour movement, often bringing about much needed change.

Young apprentices have challenged low age-related pay and poor conditions in the skilled trades. Young women have campaigned for political rights, equality at work and access to skills and training. In the late 20th century, young members pushed trade unions to expand their range of concerns to take on board issues such as reproductive rights, sexuality, child care and institutional racism.

The trade union movement needs its young membership to continue to challenge established ways of organising, communicating and making policy.



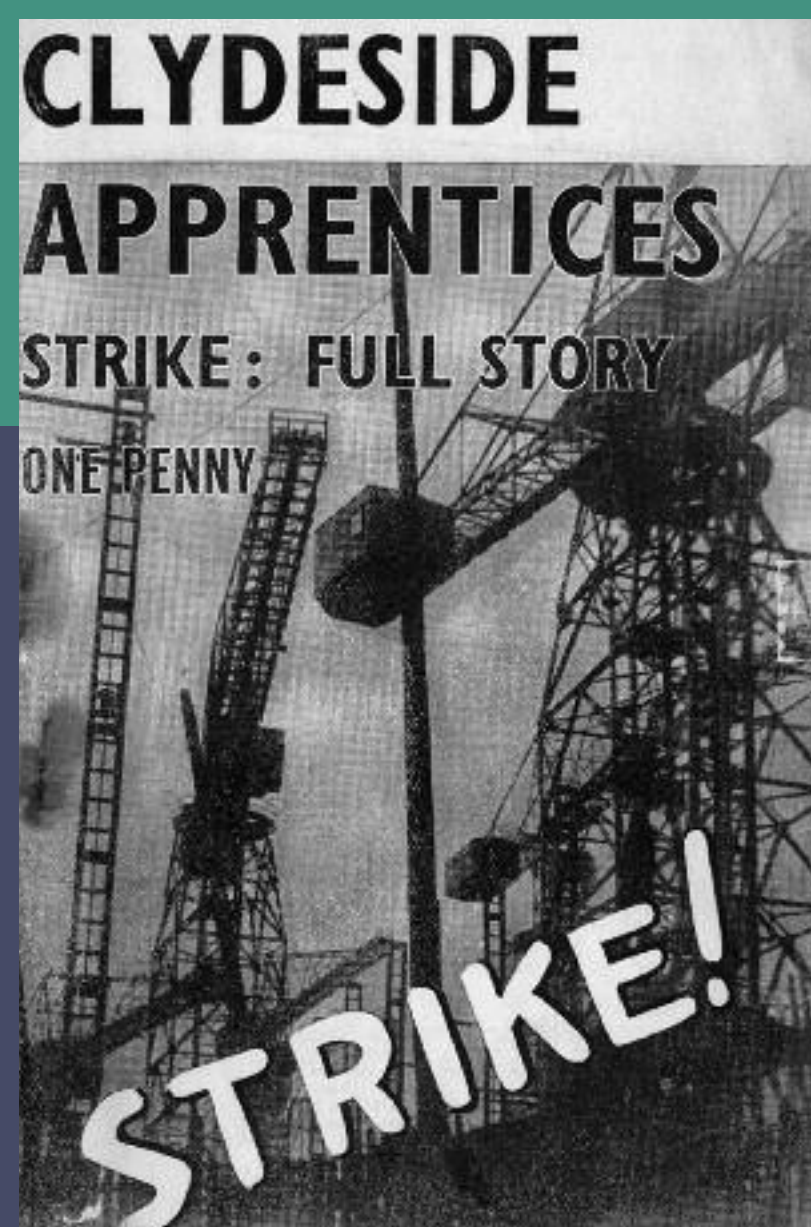
Above: 1880 petition, signed using pseudonyms, which was organised by Leeds apprentice printers to protest fines imposed on two workmates for refusing to work overtime.



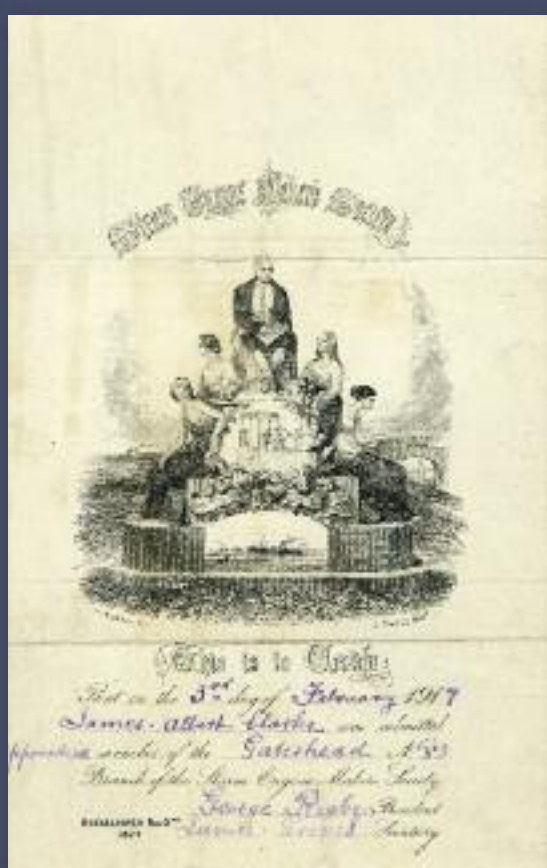
Above right: Young members of the National Federation of Women Workers at a strike meeting outside Morton's canned food factory, Millwall, London in 1914.



Left: Meeting of strikers from Back's asbestos pipe factory at the Women's Hall in Bow - headquarters of the East London Federation of Suffragettes - on July 14, 1914. The strike was led by 14 year old Rose Pengelly [3rd from right, front row] © International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam), from the Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst collection.



Above and left: Apprentices were 'bound' to their employers for several years by indentures, which forbade strike action, but under the slogan 'all for one and one for all', a strike for better training and higher wages by 3700 apprentices in engineering and shipbuilding started on Clydeside in April 1937 and then spread to Yorkshire, the Midlands and London. It ended in October, when the Amalgamated Engineering Union secured the right to negotiate on their behalf. Many local agreements gave large increases, with wage rates tied into advances won by adult skilled men.



Right: Children imitating the strikers' demonstrations during the 1911 London Dock Strike and wearing copies of the London Carmen's Trade Union sashes which read "LCTU boy".

Left: Leaflet issued by the Bentley Miners Support Group, South Yorkshire, 1984 © Bentley Miners Support Group

Far left: Apprentice's union membership certificate 1917 for Steam Engine Makers Society.



Solidarity! Young people as agents of change

1. George Howell (1833-1910) became radicalised as an apprentice shoemaker and joined the Chartist movement in 1848. Aged 21, he moved to London and became a bricklayer, leading the 1859 London builders' strike in support of a 9-hour working day. He became secretary of the London Trades Council aged 28 and was involved in the campaign for universal suffrage, becoming full-time secretary of the Reform League in 1865. He later became secretary of the TUC.

2. Robert Applegarth: (1834 –1924) had no formal education but trained as a carpenter before deciding aged 20 to emigrate to the USA. He returned home after 3 years, appalled by the institution of slavery. He became secretary of the Sheffield Carpenters Union, and rose to become secretary of the national union, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, in 1862 and a leading figure in the London Trades Council.

3. James Keir Hardie: (1856-1915) left school at 8 years and was working as a miner in Lanarkshire 3 years later. By 17 he had taught himself to read and write and in 1881 he led the first ever strike of Lanarkshire miners. He was a founder of the Independent Labour Party in 1893 and was MP for West Ham 1892-1895 and for Merthyr Tydfil from 1900. In 1906, he became Parliamentary Leader of the Labour Party.

4. Ben Tillett: (1860-1943) had little schooling and had various jobs in the Bristol area, including circus work, before becoming a seaman and travelling the world. From 1880, he worked in the London docks and formed in 1887 the Tea Operatives' and General Labourers' Association. Following the successful 1889 Dock Strike the union was renamed as the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union and Tillett remained as General Secretary until 1922 when the union was merged into the Transport and General Workers' Union. He was an MP 1917-1924 and 1929-31.

5. Margaret Bondfield: (1873-1953) worked as a shop assistant in Brighton and London, becoming assistant secretary of the Shop Assistants' Union in 1898 and a TUC delegate in 1899. She worked in the Women's Trade Union League, the National Federation of Women Workers, the Women's Labour League and the Adult Suffrage Society. From 1921-1938, she was the chief women's officer of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers and in 1923 first woman Chair of the TUC General Council. She was an MP 1923-24 and 1926-1931 and became the first woman Cabinet Minister and Privy Councillor when she was appointed Minister of Labour in the 1929 Labour Government.

6. Mary Macarthur: [1880-1921] was the first woman on the Shop Assistants Union National Executive aged 22 and became secretary of the Women's Trade Union League in 1903. She founded the militant general union, the National Federation of Women Workers, in 1906 and helped found the National Anti-Sweating League the same year.

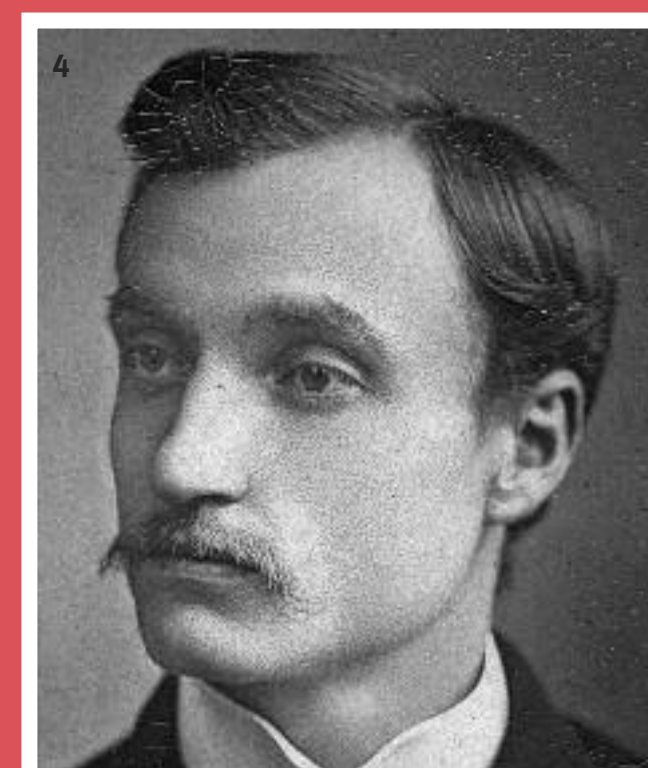
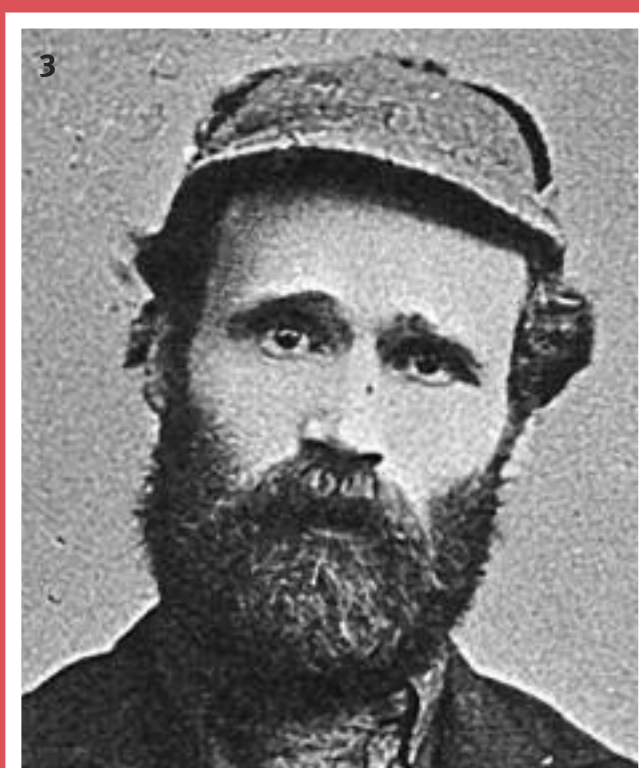
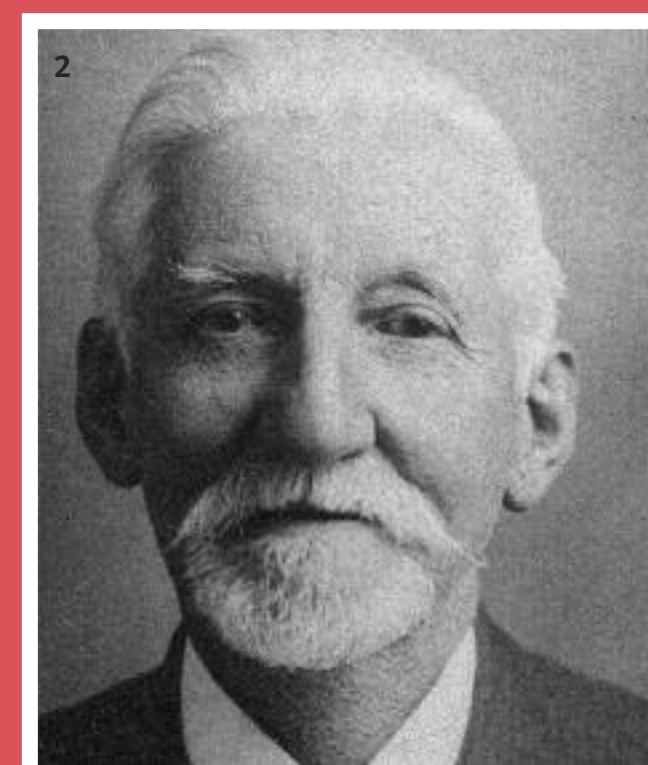
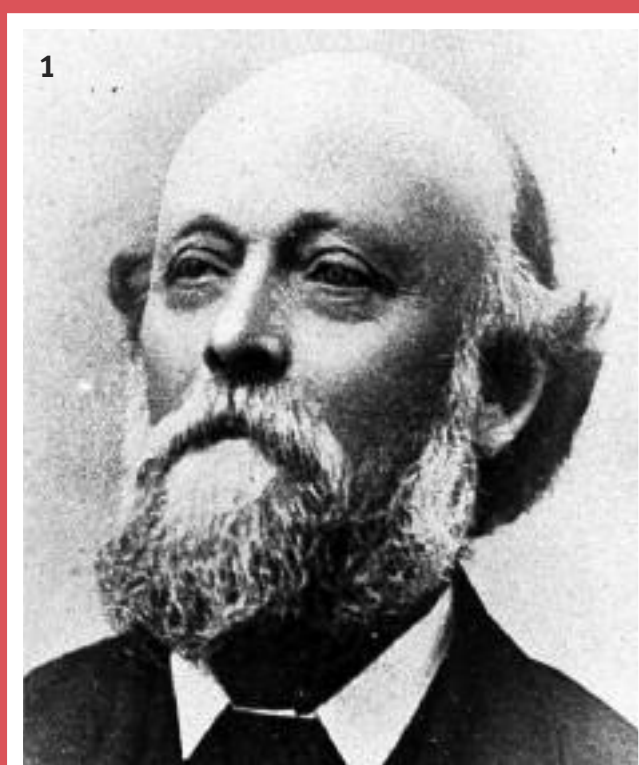
7. Ernest Bevin: (1881-1951) left school at 11. Aged 13, he moved to Bristol and worked in various jobs, eventually as a carter. He became active in socialist politics and was secretary of the Bristol Right-to-Work Committee in 1905. In 1910, he formed a carter's branch of the Dockers' Union and became a national organiser by 1913. He was first General Secretary of the Transport & General Workers' Union from 1921 and a member of the TUC General Council 1925-1940. In 1940, he became Minister of Labour in Churchill's wartime coalition and post war was appointed as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

8. Ellen Wilkinson: (1891 – 1947)
In 1910, aged 19, she won a Manchester University scholarship and became immersed in suffrage and wider political activity. In 1915, she was appointed first woman organiser of the Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees, organising unskilled shop and factory workers. She was Labour MP for Jarrow 1935-47 and later held Government posts including Minister of Education 1945-47, when she raised the school leaving age to 15 and introduced the compulsory provision of school dinners and free school milk.

9. Shen Batmaz: Fighting for Change at MacDonald's. Shen and her workmates joined the BFAWU union because they wanted to protect each other and wanted to work together to change things. "We were following McDonald's procedure, putting in grievances and trying to get things changed and we were being ignored. We realised the only way forward was to take drastic action." They went on strike in 2017 for a living wage, an end to zero hours contracts and union recognition. "The power of many together is more than the power of one."

10. Becky Baldwin: A bassist in three-piece all-girl punk band IDestroy and a member of the Musicians' Union (MU) and sits on the local committee. The union helps her check contracts, chase payments, and review her rights. "They take the time to talk me through everything; I feel like I'm in safe hands. You can get into a lot of trouble otherwise."

Most of the prominent figures and changers in the history of the Labour Movement were activists and organisers from their teenage years.



Young Workers and Unions — a TUC Library exhibition

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Learn all about it: trade union education and young people

Don't be misled by this 1937 recruitment poster! The TUC has actually produced a range of useful resources for teaching school students about the world of work and trade unions. The TUC's Unions into Schools website is designed for use at secondary level and above.

Education for union members developed from the end of the 19th century. Ruskin College, a residential college mainly sponsored by trade unions, was founded in 1899, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in 1903 and its Trade Union Committee (WETUC) in 1919. A breakaway from Ruskin led to the formation of the Plebs' League in 1908 and the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) in 1921. Attempts by the TUC in the 1920s and 30s to provide an education service had ended in failure, but in 1944, the TUC developed a plan for a college as a war memorial to trade unionists.

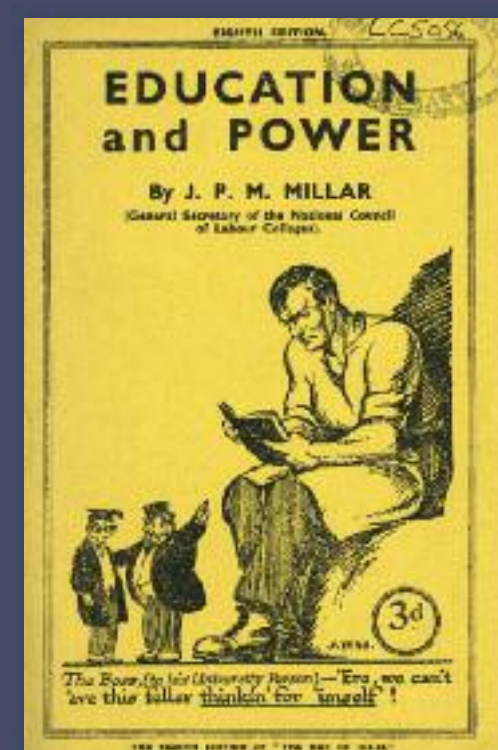
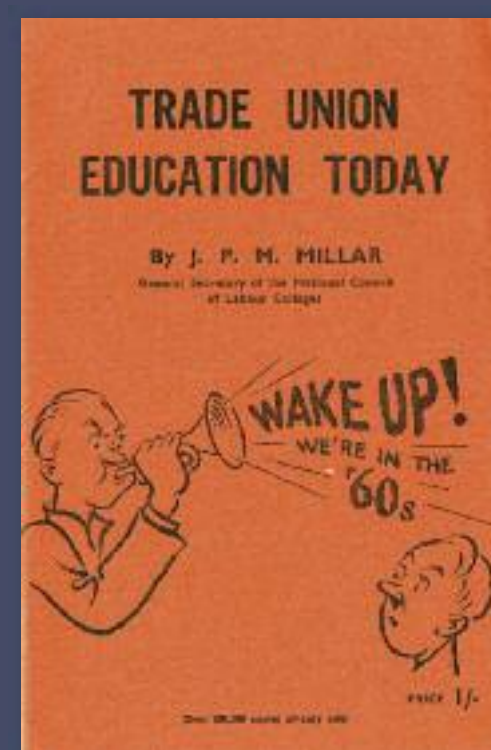
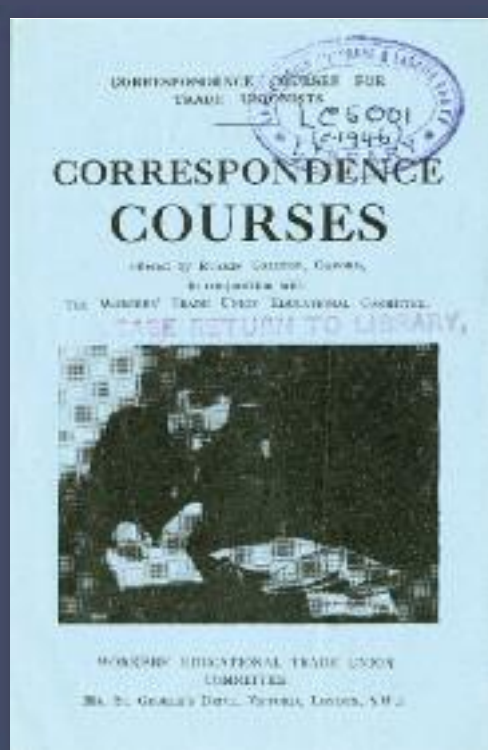
When the TUC Memorial Building – Congress House – opened in the 1950s it also held a Training College. The educational work of unions and the TUC was growing and the duplication of providers was costly. With the launch of the TUC Education Scheme in 1964, both the NCLC and WETUC were wound up. In the following years, an extensive programme of training for shop stewards, health and safety and other representatives was developed and from 1976, the TUC received a government grant for union education, and, with legal rights for union reps to training, came an expansion of day release courses. The TUC ran courses for union officers, first at Congress House, and then from 1984 – 2005 at the TUC National Education Centre in North London. The TUC trains around 30,000 union reps every year.



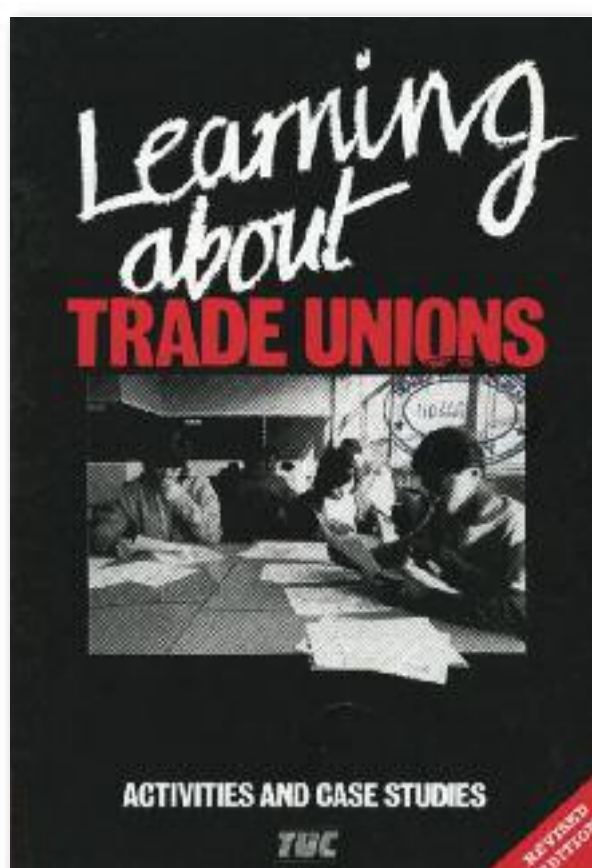
Above: The 1909 strike by students at Ruskin College led to the formation of the Plebs League and Central Labour College.

Left: Don't be misled by this 1937 recruitment poster!

Below left to right: The NCLC and WETUC dominated union education in the inter-war years. Ideologically the two organisations were poles apart. The NCLC stood for revolutionary change in society, the WEA for reformism: a divide that reflected the politics of the time and is still relevant today.



Above and right: TUC Yorkshire and Humberside Young Workers study group visit to New York, 2018.



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Now hear this! Political representation



Left: Young people have been at the core of environmental activism including Extinction Rebellion. Rebellion Day July 2019.
© Sara Nicomedi/Extinction Rebellion



Above: In 1984, students at the Polytechnic of North London (now London Metropolitan University) protested against the presence of another student, Patrick Harrington, a prominent member of the National Front. Two student leaders were imprisoned for defying a court order preventing them from barring him from lectures. It was finally agreed that Harrington would be taught separately.

Right: The National Union of School Students was formed in May 1972 and was active until about 1979. Its programme included campaigning for coeducational comprehensive education, school democracy, smaller classes and against corporal punishment and uniforms.



We sometimes hear the idea that young people don't care about politics. Nothing could be further from the truth! Young people have been central to unions as well as many protest movements and demonstrations trying to make the world a better place. If we look at the contemporary movement of school strikes for the climate we see how passionate many young people are about a wide range of issues. Every generation has similar movements, although often around different issues. In the past, young people have been central to campaigns against nuclear weapons, cuts to the National Health Service and other social security protections. In the 1980s, young people were crucial in maintaining a non-stop protest (picket) outside the South African embassy in London to protest against the unfair apartheid policies that divided that country so profoundly. Often these movements have made older politicians and union leaders sit up and take notice. Protest and activism work!



Far left: Labour Party League of Youth, 1933.

Left: 1929 General Election campaign leaflet from the Labour Party. This was the first election after the 1928 Representation of the People Act established equal franchise at 21 years of age.

The workers war

Right: During World War 1, sport was encouraged amongst female munition workers as it was thought to be good for their health and general moral wellbeing. Many factories had their own women's football teams such as this one from the Associated Equipment Company (AEC) factory at Beckton, London. Many of the teams continued after the war, but women were banned from playing in Football League grounds in 1921.
© Imperial War Museum



Left: A group of Bevin Boys leaving St Pancras station for training in Chesterfield in January 1944. Due to labour shortages in coal production during the war, compulsory conscription known as the Bevin Boys scheme was introduced in 1943. Young men, registering for military service, were selected by lottery and diverted to mining.

Below: In early 1941, an apprentices' strike started on the Clyde and spread to Lancashire. Frustrated by slow negotiations led by the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the young men set up their own unofficial committees but managements refused to negotiate with them. Following a Court of Inquiry, a new scale of wages was agreed and they returned to work. In April, a further 6000 left work in Rochdale and Manchester, but 1100 strikers of the right age were threatened with conscription and by April 12 all apprentices had returned to work



Left: From 1939-1943, the number of women in industry rose by 2 million to 7.25 million - initially voluntarily and from 1941 conscripted. To meet childcare needs, the government funded local authority nurseries. At the same time, the number of women trade unionists doubled to 1.9 million.



Above: After the Second World War, National Service, a form of peacetime conscription, was introduced for all able-bodied men between the ages of 18 and 30 -initially serving for 18 months, but later extended to two years. Between 1949 - when the National Service Act came into force - and 1963 - when the last National Serviceman was demobbed - more than 2 million men were conscripted to the armed services. This 1956 Labour Party pamphlet calls on the Conservative Government to reduce the length of service and to end it by 1958.



Above: This press report from 1944 reports the concern of the TUC Women's Committee that the lack of social clubs for young women war workers resulted in their frequenting public houses.

Young workers were called on to bear the brunt of the labour for the two world wars of the twentieth century both in the armed forces and on the home front. Often for many women workers they were replacing those male workers who had been conscripted. Committed to Britain taking a stand against fascism, they were also determined to ensure that there was equality of sacrifice on the home front through trade union activity.

Membership of unions grew rapidly during World War 2 with many young workers becoming union stewards and taking an active role in their unions in support of the War. A Joint Consultative Committee with both union and employer representatives was set up to advise the Government on production. Both sides accepted Emergency Powers allowing control of labour, compulsory arbitration in disputes and a ban on strikes. In return, the government improved factory working conditions with canteens, washrooms and other welfare facilities.

The TUC, both nationally and locally, was seen as essential to the war effort and was consulted on many issues including food supply and air raid precautions. The TUC also began lobbying for radical social change in post-war Britain, producing bold plans for wider access to education and welfare, for a national health service, and for economic reconstruction including public ownership, industrial democracy and price control.

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Bread and Roses too! – culture and recreation for all



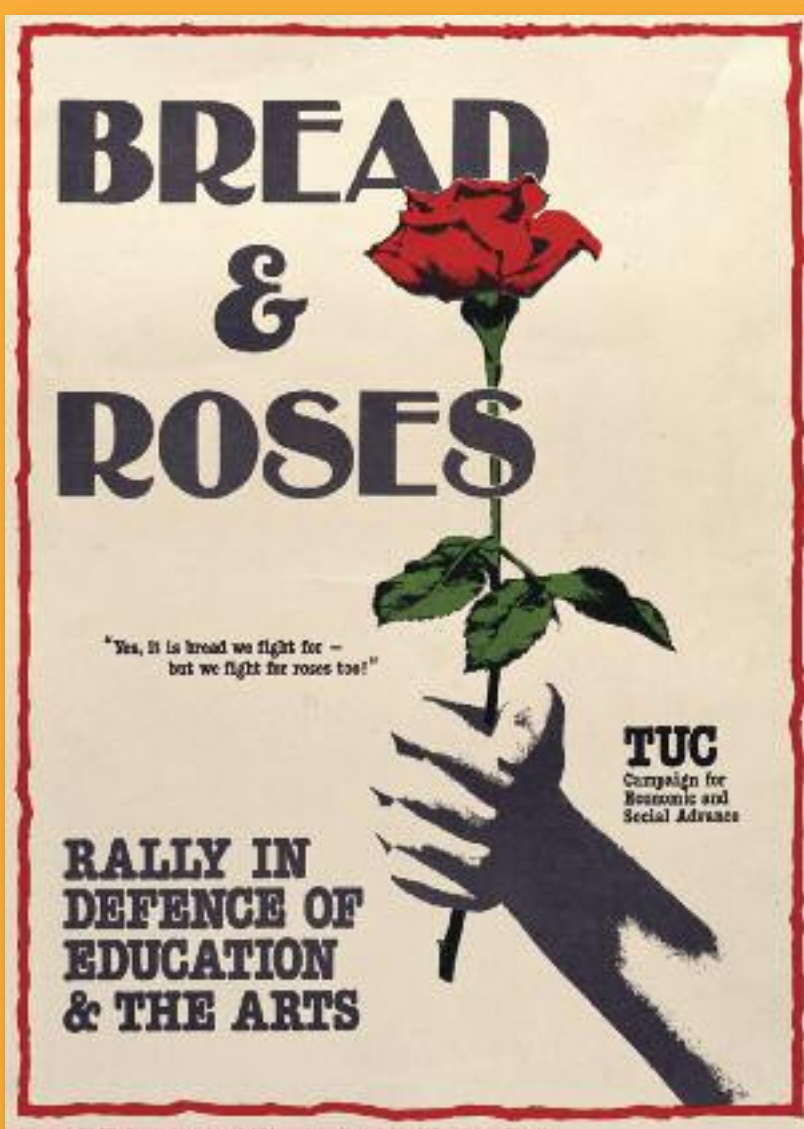
Right and left: In the 1960s, the Centre 42 group of artists, writers, actors and musicians, led by Arnold Wesker, organised a series of local trade union festivals. They took their name from Resolution 42 passed at the 1960 TUC Congress, which stressed the importance of the arts in the community and urged unions to participate in cultural activities.



The TUC first began to campaign for a paid holiday for workers as far back as 1911, often fighting against hard government and business resistance. Lobbying helped incrementally introduce legislation that protected worker's rights, and now most enjoy holidays with pay in some form, mainly through union negotiated collective agreements.

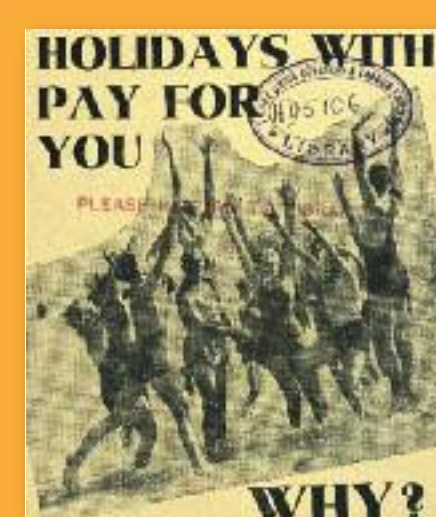
The trade union movement has also recognised the arts, and access to cultural institutions such as museums, galleries and libraries, as central to the quality of life. Policies and campaigns have always focussed on equality of access and public funding, whilst austerity and privatisation have threatened access. Trade unions have campaigned against cuts to public library services, which often impact the young and poorer in society disproportionately.

Trade unions have appreciated the power of popular culture as a medium for raising awareness and have organised and participated in music events and festivals throughout Britain including Tolpuddle and Left Field at Glastonbury Festival.



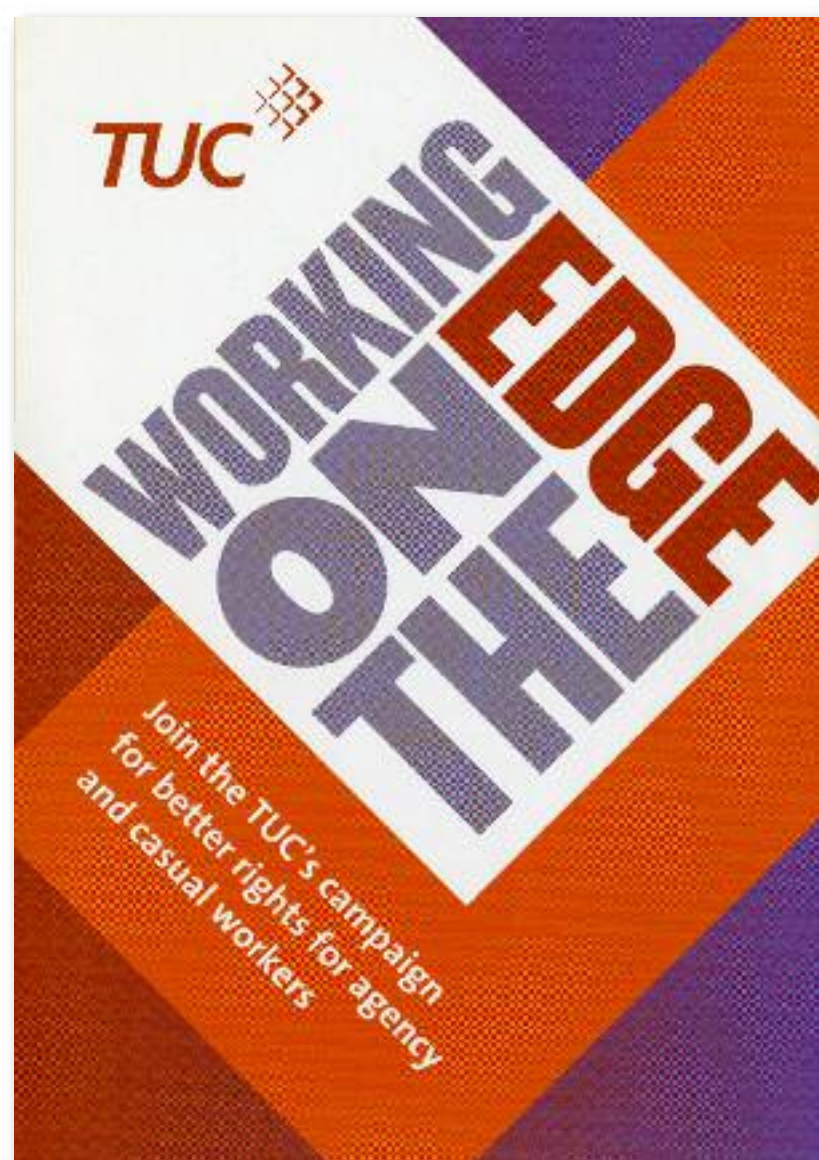
Above: This article in the National Union of Clerks journal, 'Youth at Work' July 1938, urges young members to join the National Clarion Cycling Club. 'The Clarion' was a socialist newspaper set up in the 1890s, which encouraged its readers to join with like-minded people in a number of cultural and leisure activities. There were Clarion cycling, camera, rambling and swimming clubs, choirs and dramatic societies.

Above right: This popular music contest was organised annually by the London Trades Council through the 1960s to attract and recruit young trade unionists. In 1964, 70 singers and groups entered and first prize went to 'The Eastsiders' sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union.



Left: The TUC first began to campaign for a paid holiday for workers in 1911, but it did not become a statutory right until the 1938 Holidays with Pay Act.

TUC and today's workplace



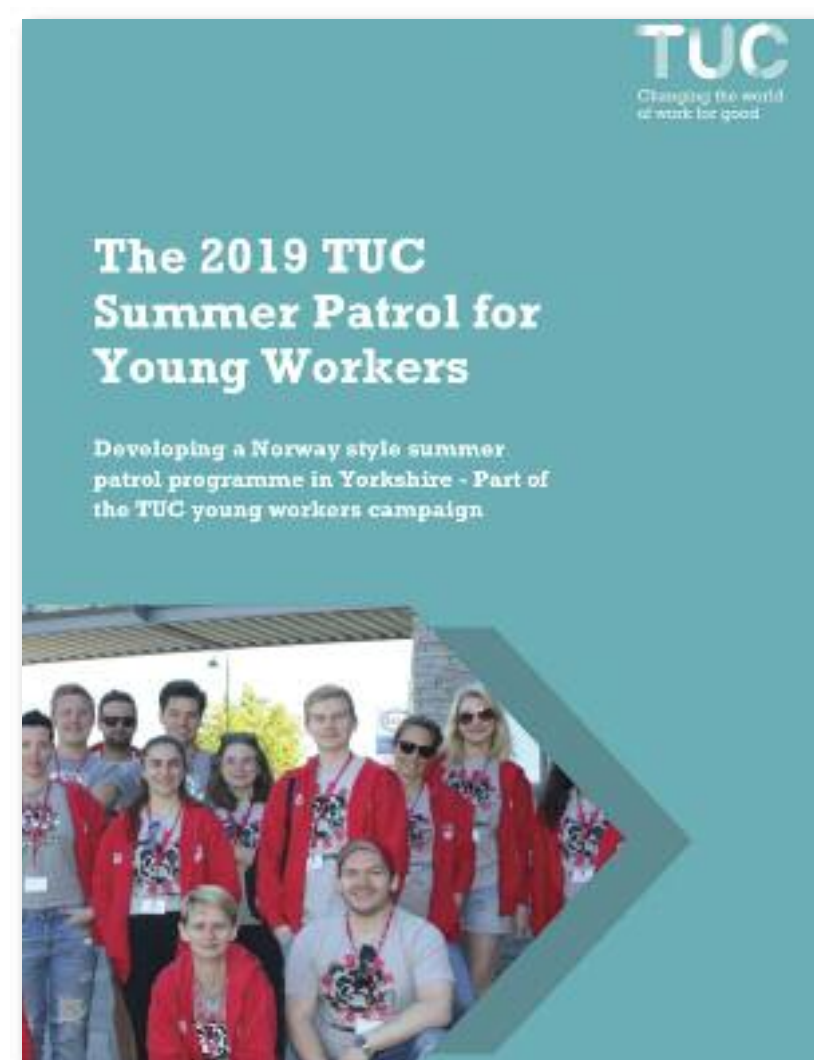
Above: © South West TUC Magazine.

Left: © RMT

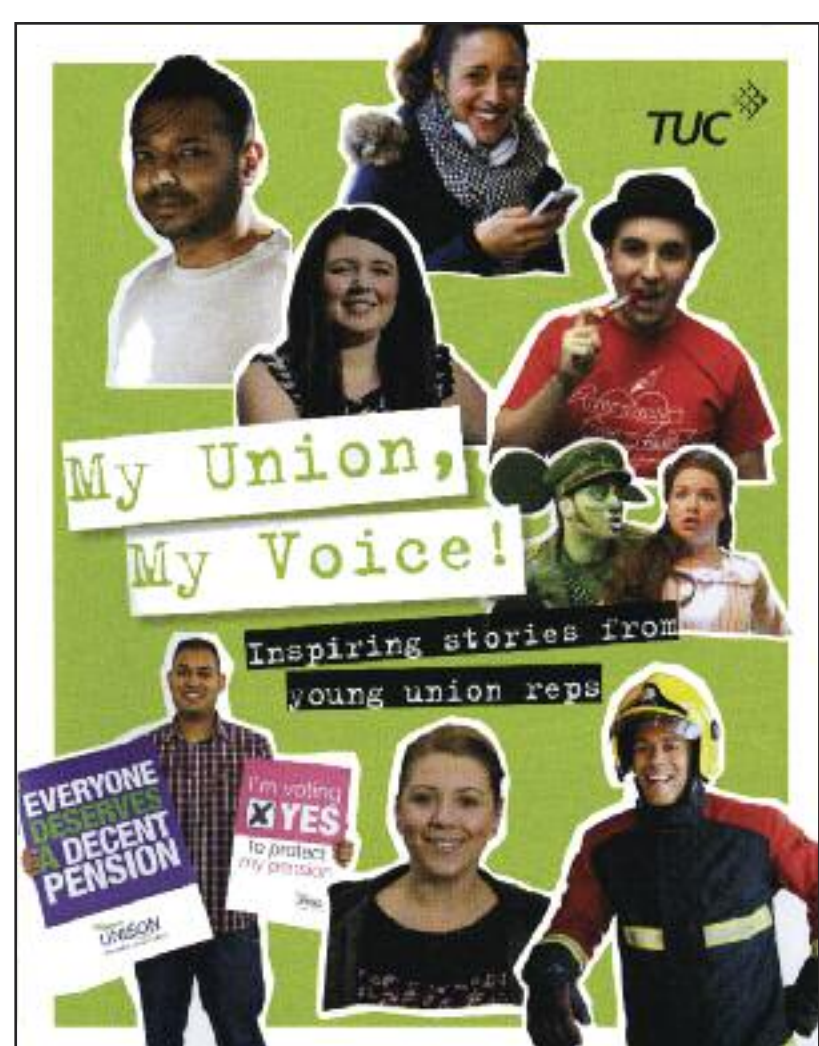


Younger workers are often at the sharp end of bad working practices and most in need of support with low pay, lack of voice and the gig economy. Trade unions support them with all these issues and more every day.

Today, much of the TUC's work supporting younger workers is supported by the Young Worker's Forum made up of representatives from affiliates. They hold Young Worker's Month every November and choose two priority campaigns at conference each year. The TUC also runs an innovation programme exploring how trade unions can better reach younger workers. The main output has been a career coach app to add a new, relevant offer to trade union's repertoire



Above and below: In 2019, TUC Yorkshire started a recruitment drive where activists travel from town to town, visiting businesses unannounced to speak to young workers about their conditions and rights at work.



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To those who allowed us to use their images.

Curator – Chris Coates with help from Prof. Melanie Simms, Jeff Howarth (TUC Library) and Mike Smith

Design – Becky Shand

Coordinator – Jeff Howarth (TUC Library)

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