

National Executive Council Elections 2023: Nomination requests

Andrew BERRY

Islington LG Branch
Membership No. 3228693

Standing in the
National Disabled Members'
General seat



Tara THOMAS

Swindon LG Branch
Membership No. 8511338

Standing in the
National Disabled Members'
Women's seat



Dear Branch Secretary,

We are writing to you to request your branch's nomination for the Disabled Members seats on the NEC for 2023.

- Andrew Berry, for the Disabled Members' General Seat.
- Tara Thomas, for the Disabled Members' Women's seat.

All UNISON members face the threat of a spiralling cost-of-living crisis and we face now, further austerity from a Tory Government which is determined to make us pay for the economic crisis. These elections are hugely important in determining the way that UNISON tackles these issues. We are standing in solidarity with the Time for Real Change majority on the current NEC. We fully support the democratisation of the union and ensuring that the union's strategy and organisation fits the needs of the situation our members currently face.

Tara Thomas: about me

I am a qualified social worker, working with vulnerable adults with physical disabilities and substance misuse. A member of the Swindon LG UNISON Branch for over 12 years, and currently its Black Members Officer, I am active within the National Black Members Committee, focusing on equality and diversity within the workplace and ensuring fairness for all black workers.

I have been active in the Regional Women's Committee for over five years and for the past two years, have been one of its coordinators; through this, I have campaigned for society to have a better understanding of the impact that menopause has on women and for the discrimination that women face within the workplace to be challenged.

I have a hidden disability and **being active on both the National and Regional Disabled Members Committees** has been of equal importance to me. I have through these been involved

in campaigning for reasonable adjustment and for use of the Disabled Passport within the workplace. I strive to ensure that disabled members are treated fairly, not only in their workplaces but within their communities. Access is one of the biggest problems for disabled members, and the challenge is continuous.

If elected to the NEC, my aim would be to be a voice for disabled members and ensure that disability issues are always on the agenda. I want the NEC to encourage branches to challenge employers on disability issues. Many employers still refuse to accept a worker is disabled and entitled to reasonable adjustments unless their impairment is obvious.

Amongst black people, there is disproportionate experience of impairments such as diabetes, sickle cell and lupus. It is important that branches seek to negotiate disability equality policies with their employer to reduce the risk of disabled workers being denied reasonable adjustments because of racism.

I will push for **disabled women to fulfil their potential**, looking at the different ways they can become involved in UNISON. I will support them in understanding the processes that will facilitate their participation, beginning at the branch level and working their way up to regional and national levels.

I will always remain true to members and will always challenge the relentless and tiring discrimination and racism experienced by disabled members.

Andrew Berry: about me

A member of the Islington UNISON LG branch in London, I am currently the Labour Link officer for the branch and also a member of the London Regional Committee. I have long experience as a UNISON activist, having sat on the UNISON National Labour Link Committee for 8 years, elected by the members as a regional rep. For ten years, I was also the branch's Deputy Branch Secretary. I have been an active Labour party member since 1984 and am currently acting as the trade union officer in the Islington North constituency. I work full-time for Islington Council social services as a Case Manager, working with adults in the community, responding to any changes in their needs, and providing appropriate social care support.

I have **regularly attended UNISON disabled members conferences**, representing disabled members from my branch. The cost-of-living crisis is hitting disabled members hard, with many of them needing to keep equipment and heating running or otherwise, risk health problems. Despite what the Government is saying, Covid is still with us and many disabled members, including myself, remain particularly at risk of infection. Over the last year, I have been campaigning for basic health and safety measures to be implemented in order to reduce the risk of transmission. If elected to the NEC, I would like to see UNISON campaign for workplace health and safety measures such as ventilation, filtration and CO2 monitoring. UNISON should also **campaign for full sick pay in all our workplaces so that members can afford to stay at home and not spread pathogens such as Covid and flu**. Workplaces should be safe and accessible for all. Long Covid is a time bomb, as people are becoming disabled by its long-term effects. UNISON is right to continue to campaign for it to be recognised as a disability.

I am proud of UNISON's record on equality and its support for self-organisation. There is, however, no room for complacency. Sexism, misogyny, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and disability discrimination need to be fought in society and our workplace, but we have also seen from examples like the Forde report in the Labour Party that our own movement is not immune. We must never let up in our fight for equality and human rights. If elected, I will remain steadfast in standing up for self-organised groups.

What we stand for

UNISON must be a member-led union – We believe this means that elected members should run our union, not selected full-time officials. We want to work with all our paid officials, but it is

members and their elected representatives that should be the real leaders. **We need to be an organising, not a servicing, union** – we cannot solve all of our members' problems on a one-by-one basis. Members will always need individual support, but the focus should be on collective action. We need to increase UNISON's collective and organising activities and to empower our members. **Every large city and county** should have a proud UNISON resource centre in the high street: we need to make it as easy as possible for members to find us. We must present UNISON as a vibrant, democratic, fighting and organising union.

The pay crisis – UNISON must end the scourge of low pay. For too long UNISON has failed to adequately fight poverty pay, pay freezes and below-inflation deals. We cannot simply approach pay negotiations the way that UNISON's leadership has done in the past. Hikes in the price of fuel, heating and food are seriously impacting our members. No UNISON member should have to rely on food banks. We need fully funded and staffed public services. Members should not pay the cost of Tory austerity. To achieve this, we want **more cooperative relationships with other unions**. We should work together whenever we can.

We must support members needing to take industrial action. Strike pay rates have increased substantially, but there is more to do. UNISON only has a national strike fund of £21 million. This must change if we are to show employers and government, we mean business. Also, we need to ensure that every region supports branches who need to carry out effective strike action.

UNISON's finances – We need full disclosure and transparency as to how members' money is spent. We must make best use of the surpluses made nationally and locally during the pandemic. Also, we must review UNISON's large property estate and where appropriate, free up resources for organising. We must continue to bring the UNISON Staff Pension scheme deficit down to manageable levels. Members' subs should not be required to keep the scheme afloat. **We should insure all outsourced UNISON services wherever feasible**, based on our trade union values and our aspirations for our union. **We need a green agenda within UNISON**, including an audit of UNISON company cars and the proliferation of meetings requiring members and staff to travel long distances.

We believe that UNISON should play a positive but challenging role in the Labour Party. UNISON resources and influence should be used to promote the removal of anti-trade union laws, public delivery of public services and a green new deal that tackles the climate emergency through the creation of green, well-paid, union jobs.

Equalities in UNISON are central to our vision. There have been some major developments over the last two years. But there is much more to do to make equality a reality through our entire union, not just its NEC but at all tiers of our union, including within its staffing.

Legal advice – We must review UNISON's main legal services contract and particularly the difficulties branch secretaries have accessing timely employment law advice.

We need a robust and effective review of staffing to ensure that the great work our staff do is as efficient and meaningful to members as it can be. **We believe UNISON members should decide whether our most senior roles should be elected.**

We must end once and for all the punitive culture of disciplinary action. Disciplinary investigations into members take far too long, with no regard for welfare. We must continue to look at these processes from top to bottom and end their use to resolve political differences.

We are confident that the ideas we support will build on the progress made over the last two years. We urge all UNISON members to vote for Time for Real Change candidates in these NEC elections and, if you are able, to help us campaign for real change in UNISON.

Yours sincerely

Tara Thomas
Andrew Berry