



# **BFAWU PARLIAMENTARY GROUP**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2023-2024**

## PARLIAMENTARY OVERVIEW

This report summarises work undertaken by the BFAWU Parliamentary Group during the period from the return from Summer Recess in September 2023 through to the announcement of the 2024 General Election, which will take place on Thursday 4 July.

Group Chair Ian Mearns will not be re-standing at the election, whilst other Group members Jeremy Corbyn, Claudia Webbe and Dianne Abbott have scandalously been prevented from standing as Labour candidates.

On 12 June 2024, the Group held a launch meeting for the *Bakers Dozen* election manifesto, which presents 13 policy demands to candidates of all parties, based on a survey of BFAWU members and previous Conference policy decisions. Speaking at the launch in Committee Room 13 of the Commons were Rebecca Long-Bailey, Lord John Hendy and the SNP's Chris Stephens, who were joined by a range of supportive MPs in paying tribute to the campaigning work of the union.

Long-Bailey, who stood for the Labour leadership against Keir Starmer, has agreed to take over as Chair of the Group after the election. The BFAWU Parliamentary Group will continue to be open to any elected MPs who are willing to stand up for the interests of workers, whether they are Labour, nationalist, Green or independents. The Labour leadership is already coming under pressure from business lobbying to drop key elements of the New Deal for Working People, with Lord Mandelson taking to the press to warn Starmer to face down the unions. Workers' rights and the repeal of anti-union laws are likely to be key battlegrounds going forwards.

The Government's legislative programme for the last session, announced in the King's Speech (11 November), was notable mainly for its lack of substance. The most controversial Bill to be brought forward sought to rescue the Government's Rwanda scheme, following a High Court ruling. The Tories continued to appeal to anti-migrant prejudice by forcing through legislation that unilaterally declares Rwanda to be a safe country. Despite opposition, this has now been passed as law, although no flights to Rwanda are expected to take place before polling day. The BFAWU Parliamentary Group will lobby the next Government in July to scrap the scheme immediately.

Speculation about the timing of the General Election was rife throughout the period of this report, with Rishi Sunak's Tories trailing in the polls and increasingly facing the prospect of mutiny from his own MPs. Dr Dan Poulter crossed the floor from Labour to the Tories, followed shortly by the bizarre defection of right-wing Dover MP Natalie Elphicke, who had previously backed Boris Johnson and taken a hard line against immigration.

The Spring Budget statement on 6 March saw some pre-election tax giveaways such as National Insurance cuts, but Hunt failed to highlight that this would be outweighed by the impact of freezing tax thresholds, drawing more and more households into paying higher tax each year. The Budget also stressed the need for a further tightening of non-protected Government department budgets after the election (including Health, Justice, Education and Defence), with the IFS suggesting this would mean real-terms cuts of 3.4% in future years. It

is feared that the real extent of the cuts will be masked by the expectation of impossible “efficiency savings”.

Meanwhile Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves has done little to indicate that Labour would diverge significantly from Tory spending plans in the short term if, as polls indicate, they form the next Government. The pledge to invest £28bn into the green economy, for example, has been scrapped, and Labour appears to be relying on the restoration of growth in the economy to create greater scope for investment in the longer term.

The British response to the Israeli assault on Gaza in the wake of last year’s 7 October attacks by Hamas has continued to generate widespread public opposition and mass protest. Former Home Secretary Suella Braverman was sacked after labelling peace protestors as “hate marchers” intent on desecrating the cenotaph on Armistice Day, inciting far right counter-protestors, and criticising the policing of the demos. Meanwhile claims of fears for MPs’ safety were used by the Speaker to head off an SNP motion calling for immediate ceasefire, which led Sunak to claim democracy was under threat from “mob rule” and Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove rushing through plans to widen the scope of groups considered to be “extremist”. BFAWU Parliamentary Group members were amongst the 56 rebels who broke the Labour whip to call for an immediate ceasefire. With the International Criminal Court having issued an arrest warrant to Benjamin Netanyahu on charges of war crimes, the BFAWU’s *Bakers Dozen* election manifesto call for a full embargo on arms sales to Israel is now extremely urgent.

The BFAWU Parliamentary Group has continued to remain active on the union’s behalf, holding regular virtual Group Meetings, online and offline meetings with Shadow Ministers and other MPs, tabling Written Questions and intervening at Committees, Oral Questions and debates wherever possible.

Detailed BFAWU briefings and media releases on a wide range of issues are circulated by Solidarity Consulting to inform MPs and Peers.

Both the General Secretary and the President have given evidence to Parliamentary Select Committees during this period (see below).

Key campaigns pursued in the past 12 months and summarised in this report include:

- **Food Prices and Supermarket Profiteering**
- **Low Pay, Poverty and Food Insecurity** (including the Food and Work Network, Right to Food campaign, and Free School Meals campaign)
- **Sexual Harassment**
- **Employment and Trade Union rights**
- **Reform of Joint Enterprise legislation**



**This report was written and compiled by  
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*Solidarity Consulting works in Parliament on a not-for-profit basis for trade unions and third-sector organisations, and acts as the Secretariat to the BFAWU Parliamentary Group, Justice Unions Parliamentary Group (JUPG) and the Trade Union Coordinating Group (TUCG). Working directly with BFAWU Head Office, we advise the union and Parliamentarians of opportunities to raise issues of concern to BFAWU members, convene Group meetings, lobbies and drop-in briefings, provide written briefings to MPs and Peers, draft letters to Ministers, table Early Day Motions, written and oral Parliamentary questions, clip video interventions for use on social media, and help to raise the profile of BFAWU in Parliament.*

# BFAWU CAMPAIGNS

## SUPERMARKET PROFITEERING, FOOD PRICES AND PRESSURE ON SUPPLIERS

Core to the Group's work is the attempt to identify the factors behind the pressure on pay and conditions of workers in the food sector, whose efforts as key workers throughout the Covid pandemic helped both to feed the public but also to boost the profits of the big supermarkets. Since then, food prices rocketed by a staggering 19.2% on average in the year to March 2023. Partly this was a result of higher input costs owing to the war in Ukraine and the surge in energy prices. But although the pace of price rises has now finally begun to fall, this does not mean that key grocery products have returned to their previous prices. Using so-called "rocket and feather" pricing tactics, it is increasingly believed that the supermarkets are inflating their profits whilst continuing to squeeze their suppliers to a point where many fear for the continued commercial viability of their businesses. This was highlighted in Early Day Motion 784 tabled by Ian Mearns on behalf of the Group in the previous session.

BFAWU submitted written evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee inquiry into "Fairness in the Food Supply Chain" and, working with allies on the committee (particularly Ian Byrne and Barry Gardiner), secured an invitation for General Secretary Sarah Woolley to give oral evidence (9 January 2024) alongside grocery suppliers and labour suppliers.

**Barry Gardiner:** Sarah, you and your union have said that supermarkets are exploiting their market position. You have said they make excess profits at the expense of consumers and suppliers and those they employ. Can you tell us again the basis of that assertion?

**Sarah Woolley:** We have always recognised that part of the reason for higher prices has been the surge in cost of some ingredients and part of that is due to the war in Ukraine. Higher costs of wheat, flour, energy, transport and fuel have an obvious impact on the cost of a loaf, cake or biscuit. However, while supermarkets are very quick to put prices up when the input costs go up, they generally do not fall as quickly when they fall as well. That has been described, I believe, as a rocket and feather pricing strategy.

The last Competition and Markets Authority report found that in the last two years around three-quarters of branded suppliers of products such as baby milk formula, baked beans, mayonnaise and others have increased their unit profitability and, in doing so, have contributed to higher food price inflation.

It is true that in some other areas supermarkets have struggled to maintain their margins, especially where customers who are struggling—our members are an example of that—have traded down to cheaper own-brand products. This results in additional pressure then being put on suppliers and the supply chain to squeeze down their costs. That means the pressure on pay, terms, and conditions of workers are impacted as well.

Our members are effectively being hit twice by the increasing costs they are paying when they go to the supermarket and the decrease in terms and conditions because of the pressure of the supermarkets. A 1 or 2p reduction on a loaf may not sound like a lot of money, but if you think about it, some of the big national companies may make 2 million products a day and that 1 to 2p suddenly adds up to quite a significant amount.

We have seen it happen repeatedly over the last decade, where supermarkets have moved between the three national bread suppliers, which has then had an impact on jobs. For example, Hovis lost a single contract to supply into Co-op supermarkets. That contract was worth around £75 million. This resulted directly in the closure of the Birmingham Garretts Green site and 500 job losses. That is just one example. If the Committee wants more examples we can send some in writing afterwards because there have been more recent ones pre and through Covid. This all results in Bakers members having even less in their pockets to feed themselves and their families as a minimum and, worst-case scenario, having to find another job.

What cannot be denied is that shareholders of the likes of Tesco and Sainsbury's, for example, have been increasing their ordinary share dividends to the highest level since 2015 at the same time as our members, communities, families and friends are worrying about how they will eat. Tesco dividends rose to £859 million last year, so somebody is definitely profiting, but it is not the consumers and it is not the workers.

The *Bakers' Dozen* election manifesto calls for a windfall tax on supermarket profits, which would provide some immediate redress. But since the “below-cost selling” scandal of the early noughties, where a loaf of bread was being sold for as little as 19p despite costing more than 26p to produce – threatening to put bakeries out of business – the Group has argued for legal power to provide price floors and ceilings to limit exploitation by supermarkets of both consumers and suppliers. This is now being widely echoed by others in the groceries sector. An official Parliamentary petition (which passed 100,000 signatures and hence triggered a debate on 22 January) says:

Almost half (49%) of a panel of 100 UK fruit and veg farmers fear they will have to give up their farm within the next 12 months, and many raised concerns about the behaviour of supermarkets, with 69% agreeing that tougher regulations are required to redress the imbalance of power between farmers, processors and the supermarkets.

Whilst the Groceries Code Adjudicator has the power to fine supermarkets which breach their “fair dealing” responsibilities under the code, it has no power to intervene directly on prices. However, the French Government pressured its supermarkets into accepting price control agreements and, with the political will to act, it would be possible to legislate to introduce a much more powerful regulator in the sector.

## **FOOD INSECURITY AND THE RIGHT TO FOOD**

The impact of higher prices at the supermarkets has been felt acutely by households across the country. The Trussell Trust alone distributed 3.1 million food bank parcels in the 12 months to March 2024. It is known that an increasing number of food bank users are in work, and this is just the tip of the iceberg, with people often only visiting to food banks as a last resort after facing weeks of food insecurity. As the SNP's Chris Stephens told a Parliamentary debate on a “UK Food Poverty Strategy” (22 April):

**Chris Stephens:** The Government's family resources survey recently found that between 2019-20 and 2022-23, household food insecurity increased for the UK as a whole from 8% to 10%. Larger families with children are particularly vulnerable to this form of injustice. A survey commissioned last year by Feeding Britain found that although 3% of households with no children reported accessing a food bank, that proportion increased to 6% among those with one child and 7% among those with two children. The highest proportion—13%—was found among those with three or more children. In a similar vein, adults living in a household with three or more children were

almost four times as likely to report skipping meals every day because there was not enough money for food than those with one child, and almost six times as likely than those with no children.

The Minister will know that this injustice is felt by people both in and out of paid employment. Among members surveyed by the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, the number relying on food banks increased between 2021 and 2023 from 7% to 17%. Those relying on friends and family have gone from 20% to 34%, and those eating less have gone from 35% to 57%. Of those surveyed, 80% are eating cheaper—unhealthier—meals, 55% have been worried about running out of food and 45% have skipped meals.

BFAWU has continued to highlight the scandal of food workers struggling to feed themselves and their families. As the General Secretary told the EFRA Select Committee, this scandal needs to be addressed by the introduction of a statutory Right to Food:

**Sarah Woolley:** [...] we have conducted research that demonstrates that the affordability of food is a major issue for food workers themselves, hence food insecurity.

...When we surveyed our members in 2021 and again in 2023, 45% of them told us last year that they were skipping meals, whether to ensure that the children could eat or whether they were just ensuring there was enough food to last until the next pay day. Fifty-seven per cent are eating less because they are struggling to afford food and 17% of those who responded told us they were regularly using foodbanks. These are all food workers—as I mentioned earlier, classed as key workers through the pandemic—struggling to put food on the table.

**Barry Gardiner:** How is the right to food going to help them? Tell us what the right to food means, in your understanding.

**Sarah Woolley:** There are a few aspects of it. A lot of it is covered in writing in our report. We know that food poverty is just not a product of how the food system is structured, although the shape of the labour market in the UK, including the food sector itself, is a massive issue on that. It is also about decisions taken in relation to the welfare system, the asylum system and the Government's failure to provide universal free school meals, for example, which is part of our right to food call.

A statutory right to food will mean that legislators considering all future public decisions would have to consider how they would impact on the basic ability of a household to feed themselves appropriately. In real terms it will mean our members not skipping meals or eating less so their children can eat or they would not have to ration the food to get through to the next pay day. We have had members tell us they are skipping dinner on a night so the kids can eat and then going and doing a 12-hour nightshift in a factory. There are massive health and safety implications of that, regardless of anything else.

I am sure you will have seen the shocking NHS figure showing a big rise in admissions recently due to malnutrition and vitamin deficiency. GPs are reporting an increase in the number of children they encounter with rickets. It is not acceptable in 2024. A right to food will ensure that

**Barry Gardiner:** In the same way that at the moment every Minister, before they sign off a policy or even a proposal, has to look at an environmental impact assessment, you are saying there would have to be a similar impact assessment on people's ability to eat properly and to sustain themselves?

**Sarah Woolley:** Yes. If I can add that we do welcome the Committee's support for a public consultation on the benefits of introducing a statutory right to food and the invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur to undertake an assessment on the impact as well.

The Group wrote to Michael Fakhri, UN Special Rapporteur on Food Poverty, to suggest he visits the UK to undertake an inquiry into food poverty, and this was followed up by an evidence session with the Select Committee. Fakhri himself indicated he would welcome an invitation from the UK Government. However, despite pressure from MPs including Ian Byrne, the

Government deliberately stalled on issuing an invitation – clearly fearing embarrassment prior to the General Election.

The Group continues to work with the Food and Work Network (of academics, campaigners, trade unions and community food providers) based at Birkbeck College, University of London, and hosted a Parliamentary event on January 22 at which Ian Byrne commended the work of both BFAWU and the Food and Work Network in supporting radical action to tackle food insecurity, and keeping the issue on the political agenda ahead of the General Election.

It would be naïve to think that the election of a Labour Government would eliminate food poverty overnight, especially as the party has already committed to keeping some key drivers of food bank use including the two-child limit on Universal Credit and No Recourse to Public Funds. At the time of writing (ahead of the publication of the election manifesto) they have even failed to guarantee free school meals for all primary school pupils, successfully rolled-out in London by Sadiq Khan.

## **SEXUAL HARASSMENT, McDONALD's and INSECURE WORK**

Following revelations about the abuse of McDonald's workers, which finally came to light via after BFAWU's work during the Fast Food Rights/ McStrike campaign and via discussions with the BBC, the Business, Enterprise and Industrial Strategy Select Committee announced a one-off evidence session where the UK CEO Alistair Macrow would be summoned to give evidence (14 November 2023). Working with Select Committee Chair Liam Byrne and the committee clerks, the Parliamentary Group also secured an invitation to BFAWU President Ian Hodson and TUC Women's Officer Nikki Pound, who were able to provide essential context to the Committee:

**Ian Hodson:** We launched a campaign in about 2014. The aim of the campaign was to talk about low pay. We were having a £10 an hour campaign to abolish youth rates and end the use of zero-hours contracts. It became pretty clear as we started that campaign and started talking to workers in McDonald's that one of the biggest issues they faced was sexual harassment, which actually led to the first strikes at McDonald's. A lot of that centred around the way people felt they had been exploited, abused and harassed in the workplace.

**Chair:** Do you have a sense of how many complaints you have received so far? If you think back over what is nearly a decade, to 2014, what is the tally?

**Ian Hodson:** Every worker we spoke to raised the issue of the toxic culture inside McDonald's. It was common, whether it was the way they were spoken to, the way they were treated, the acceptance of being touched in the workplace or the use of language. It was common and it was normal, which it obviously should not be.

**Chair:** Do you have a sense of how many complaints there have been?

**Ian Hodson:** I know that in 2019 the suggestion—and it has never been repudiated by McDonald's—was that 1,000 people had brought that issue to McDonald's. That was part of the reason why the EHRC then got involved—because of the reporting of those incidents. The issue was, like I say, significant. We were talking to many workers across McDonald's at that time, and they were all telling us the same thing. We had quite a significant number of people joining the union as well at that time—it was just before covid. Obviously, during covid, we were not able to have that same interaction with workers, but following covid we have started having discussions again with them. They have seen the recent legal agreement between the EHRC and McDonald's, but they are suggesting to us that nothing has really changed. A bit of a tick-box exercise is going



on, and maybe some videos are being shown, but they are suggesting to us that the culture is not much different to what it was previously.

**Chair:** You said that McDonald's have not pushed back on that number.

**Ian Hodson:** No. I am not aware that they have, and I have never seen any anything to suggest otherwise. We join together with other trade unions across the globe—in the United States and Australia and across Europe. Funnily enough, where McDonald's do recognise trade unions—in places like New Zealand and in some of the Scandinavian countries—we do not have the same issues. But where there is no union recognition, and where we are fighting to get union recognition, it is pretty common that we have these issues.

**Chair:** Have you continued to receive reports and allegations since the EHRC agreement was brokered?

**Ian Hodson:** We have; we continue to get people coming forward. I do not know whether these are new claims or whether people feel a little more confident because of the BBC and the coverage the issue has had. Obviously, we are grateful that the EHRC took these issues very seriously, and I know from talking to some of the people that suffered in these workplaces that they are very grateful that they have finally been listened to. They did not think they would ever be listened to; they were always of the belief that they were unimportant and that the way they had been treated was not of relevance to anybody as long as profits were made by the company. They are pleased, and they have said how important it was to get that judgment, because of the way they have suffered.

**Chair:** Nikki, in your experience of working on this issue, have you found that workers experiencing sexual harassment share similar protected characteristics? For example, are cases of harassment particularly gendered? Do they relate in the main to younger workers? Can you give us any sense of the nature of these complaints and the patterns you have seen?

**Nikki Pound:** Yes, absolutely. It is really important to say that anyone can experience sexual harassment. In terms of the culture at McDonald's, the testimonies that I have heard and that we have read suggest racism, and it is intersecting with other issues as well. I think it is really important to state that.

We know that sexual harassment is more of a gendered issue, so women are more likely to experience it. We did some research as far back as 2016—the report was one of the first of its kind about sexual harassment in the workplace—and we found that half of all women had experienced some form of sexual harassment in the workplace. We recently revisited that research and did some polling of younger women, and we found that two thirds of women between the ages of 25 and 34 have experienced sexual harassment, bullying or verbal abuse at work. Most of these cases are not isolated incidents; they are not one-offs but a repeated pattern of behaviour.

We also did research back in 2021 that highlights the experiences of LGBT+ workers. It showed that seven in 10 LGBT+ workers have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace, and the rate is similar for disabled women. We also have research about the experiences of BME workers in the workplace, and over a third of BME women say that the discrimination and harassment they face in the workplace is on the basis of sex and race. So we see groups that have protected characteristics and that are already marginalised in the workplace and the labour market, and these experiences are compounded for them. Again, it tends not to be single incidents; it tends to be a repeated pattern of behaviour.

The other point to highlight—to the question of how many people come forward—is that in our research four out of five people on average do not come forward and do not report, because of the fear of reporting and of further victimisation. It is often those people who will be victimised further.

Again, looking at the testimonies we have heard from McDonald's workers, these are younger workers. It is often their first time in the workplace. They are often on insecure contracts, zero-hours contracts. Why would you come forward if the threat is that you are going to lose your hours and your pay? That is a really powerful way of stopping people coming forward and of setting a culture where people feel they might be further penalised by managers and other colleagues.

The union also briefed Committee members Ian Lavery and Andy McDonald in advance of the evidence session, and sought to highlight that the workplace culture at McDonald's was the product of both the company's hostility to trade union recognition, or even allowing organisers to speak to staff, and also the widespread use of short-term and zero hours contracts allowing managers to exploit their power over younger workers to offer or withdraw shifts. Both McDonald and Lavery challenged the McDonald's boss directly over their attitude to unions:

**Andy McDonald:** I want to press you on something else. You have heard from trade unions. Quite frankly, the disregard that McDonald's has for trade unions is utterly scandalous. Are you going to change your ways and have a much more proactive, sensible and modern approach to working with trade unions, who are there to do what you are not doing, which is to protect your employees?

**Alistair Macrow:** I am making sure we protect our employees. I am spending time talking to various people who have allowed us to get the best understanding of the challenges and how to help our particular profile of customers.

**Andy McDonald:** No, no. You're not getting away with that. Will you recognise and deal with trade unions?

**Alistair Macrow:** Our employee base includes nearly 100,000 people under the age of 20. Of under-20s in this country, only 2.4% have chosen to be part of a trade union. It is not a way of engagement that works for the profile of our customers. For me, it is important to work with people who really understand the customers we have in our restaurants.

**Andy McDonald:** Mr Macrow, you are not getting it. There has been a collapse. The very thing that you are talking about—safe and secure environments—is what trade unions focus on. You are giving me gobbledegook to tell me that they should not be involved in the process. Can't you see that they are absolutely pivotal to making sure that your staff, who you say that you care so much about, are properly protected?

**Alistair Macrow:** It is really important to understand who works in our restaurants.

**Andy McDonald:** People. Young people. Vulnerable people.

**Alistair Macrow:** Very young people. Only 4% of all trade union members in this country are under the age of 25. The trade unions are not the best people to help me understand our particular employees.

**Andy McDonald:** That is turning logic on its head—to say that having a low level of penetration of trade union membership means that it is not relevant and effective. Is the answer not to have more?

**Alistair Macrow:** I believe I have answered the question.

**Chair:** I think the point is that it is not about helping you understand the employees, Mr Macrow; it is about making sure that your workers are safe at work.

[...]

**Ian Lavery:** For the life of me I cannot understand—and I want you to tell us why—you will not allow an individual, probably a young person, probably in their first ever job and probably a dream job, to be represented by a trade union representative if they have got a serious complaint about sexual harassment.

**Alistair Macrow:** To start with the first part of your question, from the moment I started in this role, creating a safe, respectful and decent workplace was my highest priority. What happened in the summertime were some very clear testimonies, and the thing I learned there that was new to me was that there were more people who were not prepared to speak up than I expected. That was the new news.

In terms of trade union membership, every one of our employees of course is entitled to join a trade union. There is no issue with that at all. Every one of our employees is entitled to be joined

by a trade union representative if they are in a disciplinary situation. We are happy for them to do that: there is no barrier to that at all.

**Ian Lavery:** You are not anti-trade union? Are you denying the fact that, under your stewardship, your guidance, your directorship, McDonald's is anti-trade union? If you are not, why not come up with an agreement with a recognised trade union in the hospitality industry? It is quite simple; and it means that these people, who you claim from the bottom of your heart to be wanting to protect, would have some sort of protection from people other than those working in McDonald's.

**Alistair Macrow:** I want to help our people be represented in the way that they want to be represented. Their ability to speak up is really important to them. Their direct access to me is really important to them. Those are the things that really matter. As we have talked about before for young people—and we do employ an awful lot of young people—trade union representation is not something that they choose. It is not their way of engaging. As we know, only 4% of trade union members are under the age of 25—

**Andy McDonald:** Do you make it available to them at the induction stage, Mr Macrow? Do you tell them—

**Chair:** Order.

**Ian Lavery:** Mr Macrow, honestly, I cannot really understand what you are coming out with, because I clearly believe that trade union recognition, with a trade union recognition plan between the company and the bakers union would benefit every single employee. If they want to join the union, they can, by the way, and if they don't want to join the union, then they do not need to. I think that you are right in saying that.

However, I do believe that there should be a recognition agreement so that these individuals—you and Carol have read their testimonies and you have said that you are horrified—can have the ability to have a recognised trade union to represent them in the workplace. As the previous panel explained—Nikki from the TUC explained—the evidence is clear that, if there is a recognised trade union in the workplace, incidents of this nature are vastly reduced. Tell us why you will not have a recognition agreement with the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union.

**Alistair Macrow:** As I said, it is not a way that our young people are choosing to engage. My focus—

**Ian Lavery:** No, I am not asking what you think the kids might think. I am asking you, as the chief executive—I am asking you, personally—why you will not have an agreement with the trade unions. I am not asking you what you think these young people might think, because you haven't got any idea what these people might think. I am asking you why, personally—because it is within your powers—you will not agree to have a recognition agreement with a trade union in the workplace. Tell us why.

**Alistair Macrow:** I would like to repeat my earlier answer. All of our people are entitled to join up to a trade union. They are not showing a strong will to do that. That is very typical of young people. My focus now is not on talking to more people. It is about doing things—getting actions done to solve this problem in our restaurants. That is what really matters to me: solving the problem and eliminating these unacceptable behaviours so that I know that all of our people, in every single restaurant on every single shift, can work in an environment that I would expect.

**Ian Lavery:** Mr Macrow, as the Chair said, you can standardise a Big Mac; you can standardise a McFlurry; you can standardise a Chicken Royale; why can you not standardise the protection of your employees by trade union representation? You have tried to answer that three times and have not answered it once.

**Alistair Macrow:** We hold everybody to the same set of standards. That is what McDonald's is about. It is a consistent set of standards that people are expected to deliver against, and that is what we measure all of our restaurants against, whether they are owned by a franchisee or by the company. That is how we achieve a standard impact.

Later in the questioning, a McDonald's franchisee acknowledged that the standard HR guidance and resources issued by the corporate management were only “optional” for

franchise stores. Given that Macrow confirmed that not a single franchisee had been stripped of their licence where sexual harassment complaints have been upheld, it is therefore highly likely that workers remain exposed to further risk.

The session generated significant negative media coverage for McDonald's, but it will take further work to ensure that the situation improves for their workers. Ian Hodson raised the idea of a RIDDOR-style anonymous reporting mechanism for instances of sexual harassment, which would enable greater monitoring and transparency. Discussions are ongoing with the TUC's Equality and Health and Safety Officers to explore the technical aspects of the proposal and to build support for it.

The union wrote to McDonald's after the Committee meeting, offering to work with them to improve conditions. No response has been received. Legal action is being brought on behalf of former McDonald's workers by the Leigh Day solicitors, and BFAWU is also working with the TUC to bring a complaint together with other European unions to the OECD. Crucial, too, will be effective pressure on the next Government to outlaw zero hours contracts.

## **ZERO HOURS JUSTICE**

The Parliamentary Group hosted a round-table discussion on 12 June, where John McDonnell, Rebecca Long-Bailey, Lord Hendy, Kim Johnson and Apsana Begum were joined by representatives from Zero Hours Justice, BFAWU, TUC, and a former worker from rail engineering firm TMX. Despite having been working for the firm on a zero hours basis for over a decade, workers were laid off with no prior notice, without redundancy pay, and without even an opportunity to say goodbye to colleagues. Those present reflected on the importance of ending the practice of zero hours contracts and legislating in a way which doesn't leave major loopholes for the bosses to exploit.

Currently there is uncertainty over Labour's policy. Last year, Angela Rayner committed to implementing the New Deal for Working People in full, but since then documents have been published appearing to water down these commitments. Currently Labour appears to be giving workers the right to guaranteed minimum hours based on at least the average hours worked over the previous 12-week period. It remains to be seen whether employers will find work-arounds which allow them to deny full rights to their workers.

## **JOINT ENTERPRISE**

Following a roundtable discussion in November with campaigners from Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association (JENGbA), academics, lawyers and others, organised by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, Group member Kim Johnson agreed to use her success in the private members bill ballot to introduce the Joint Enterprise (Significant Contribution) Bill. This Bill, which had its Second Reading in February, aimed to ensure that only people who made a significant contribution to a crime could be convicted of that crime, addressing concerns that Joint Enterprise laws are used as a dragnet to maximise convictions, especially of Black urban youth. Speaking at February's debate, Johnson quoted JENGbA to point out that "this is a miscarriage of justice on the same scale as the Post Office Horizon scandal", adding: "People

are being sent to prison for crimes they did not commit.” Fellow Group members Dawn Butler, Florence Eshalomi, Apsana Begum, John McDonnell, Barry Sheerman and Jeremy Corbyn also spoke in favour of the Bill, while shadow minister Janet Daby highlighted how “Labour has previously said that it would look to reform joint enterprise, and that remains our ambition”. But despite Conservative member of the Justice Select Committee Rob Butler insisting that “joint enterprise is an important and valuable concept, but at the moment its application is undermining that value and carries the risk of diminishing confidence in our justice system”, Minister Gareth Bacon made clear that the Government would block any further progress by the Bill, and Johnson agreed not to take it to a vote on condition that ministers would continue to engage with her on the matter. The text of the Bill was also put forward as an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill at both Committee and Report stages but, without Government backing, the amendment failed to make progress and the Bill fell at Prorogation in May.

## TRADE UNION COORDINATING GROUP (TUCG)

BFAWU is a founder member of the TUCG, which was established in 2008 to coordinate campaigning activities in Parliament and beyond on issues of common concern between member unions. The TUCG now comprises 11 trade unions – BFAWU, Equity, FBU, NAPO, NUJ, NEU, PCS, POA, RMT, UCU and URTU – bringing the total membership of TUCG-affiliated unions to over one million trade unionists.

In this period the TUCG was chaired by RMT (2023) and UCU (2024). Key activities in the period covered by this report have included:

- Published new booklet “Workers’ Rights: What Should we Expect from a Labour Government?” on Labour’s “New Deal for Working People”, with a foreword by then TUCG Chair Mick Lynch
- Held fringes at TUC Congress, Labour Party Conference and The World Transformed to promote the booklet – with speakers including Shadow Employment Minister Justin Madders, TUC Assistant General Secretary Kate Bell, Lord John Hendy and John McDonnell, with Sarah Woolley and Ian Hodson speaking for BFAWU
- Promoted letter from non-affiliated union General Secretaries to Sir Keir Starmer in support of Andy McDonald, following the withdrawal of the whip for his speech to a pro-Palestine demonstration
- Hearing from campaigners involved in the “Universal Credit is a Trade Union Issue” campaign and agreed to follow up with information and support
- Circulated briefings and statement to MPs ahead of the Delegated Legislation Committee meeting to discuss the Minimum Service Levels Code of Practice and Regulations
- Held Annual General Meeting and Parliamentary Reception with new Chair for 2024 Jo Grady (UCU) and Fran Heathcote (PCS) and confirmed executive dates for the year ahead
- Sent letter to Keir Starmer and senior advisors urging no watering down of the New Deal for Working People
- Organised TUC Women’s Conference fringe with speakers from BFAWU, NEU, NUJ and FBU
- Organised STUC fringe on the theme of what workers need from whoever forms a Government after the General Election – speakers to include RMT, PCS, FBU and BFAWU
- Supported Lord Woodley’s Private Members Bill on Fire and Rehire, and Kim Johnson’s PMB on Joint Enterprise legislation.
- Heard from DPAC on the government’s attack on “sick note culture” and what changes to the welfare system will mean for disabled people, disabled workers and carers.

In 2024 the TUCG is chaired by UCU. A key priority remains encouraging the Labour Party to implement the New Deal for Working People in full should it form a Government after the General Election and to resist the urgings of Lord Mandelson on behalf of big business.

The TUCG website can be found at [www.tucg.org.uk](http://www.tucg.org.uk) and we are @TUCGInfo on Twitter