


Jon Trickett MP and then UCU organised the Branch's campaigning against the far right. Sarah Vero and Mili Patel were Branch Auditors, Chris Sweet edited the newsletter, David Seaton became the first Union Learning Rep and Cat Smith the first Environment Rep.



**T&G Parliamentary Staff  
Branch Newsletter**  
Unite the Union — T&G Section [www.unite-theunion.com](http://www.unite-theunion.com)



**Union survey reveals concerns on pay, stress**  
Before Christmas MPs of all parties were sent the following letter by branch chair Dan Whittle and secretary Kevin Flack:

Dear Member of Parliament,

During the recess our trade union branch encouraged MPs staff to fill in an internet survey. 146 members of staff completed the survey. Staff of MPs from all three main parties and the SNP took part.

Nearly 50% of the MPs staff members who responded to this survey said they were treated well, or pretty well as employees and this shows that working for an MP is a good job. Many spoke about the satisfaction they get from helping constituents and the privilege of working in politics. We recognise most MPs are very good employers and work in close co-operation with our branch.

However, we are concerned that 8.5% say they get less than the minimum wage due to overtime (15% of Caseworkers say they receive less than the minimum wage). 5 of the respondents only received £14,000 and there was a massive disparity in pay between people doing the same job. 17.5% received no pay rise or a pay cut this year. Alarmingly 70% said they suffer from stress, 10 from the sample have been bullied by their MP, 11 by another member of staff.

The survey shows there are some serious problems with low pay, stress and bullying (amongst other issues) that I know the MPs and House Authorities will want to move quickly to work with us. The first steps in working together with the House to remedy these issues must be union recognition for our branch, and the survey shows there is overwhelming support for recognition amongst staff of MPs. Over 100 MPs have signed an EDM asking the House Authorities to consult with us on terms and conditions and we need to do that or these problems will not go away.

Staff of MPs work hard dealing with desperate and often difficult constituents and as the survey shows, some are undervalued because MPs are not given the support they need.

We hope that you will therefore support our official recognition as the trade union branch representing MPs staff. We enclose our draft voluntary agreement.

Yours sincerely, etc.

**Branch member to defend universe**

In its quest for ever-greater influence, the branch has had one of its members installed as the next Dr Who. Matt Smith, who was made an honorary member of the branch at a reception celebrating the political drama Party Animals in Portcullis House last year, has been selected as the new Time Lord replacing David Tennant.

Smith will be the youngest son of Gallifrey to date. The initial publicity photographs of him as the Doctor have caused some controversy, with some fans criticising his hairstyle and 'foppish' appearance. Branch member Gareth Myton defended Smith's appointment, however, saying:

"As a branch member I am delighted that the BBC has chosen to go with a T&G Parliamentary Staff Branch member as the new Doctor Who. David Tennant will be missed but in Matt Smith I know that the Beeb has got it right. Perhaps we can now look forward to an episode set in parliament - I wonder if the Daleks would respect the queue-jumping rule?"

Right: New Dr Who actor Matt Smith with branch member Haroon Cross

**Message for MEPs' staff**

The Parliamentary Staff Branch of the Transport and General Workers Union (T&G) covers not only MPs staff in Westminster and Constituencies across the country, it also actively engages and represents staff members for MEPs. Therefore, it is important that T&G members that work for MEPs have a platform to share ideas and raise issues which may transpire within their working environment. I would like to hear from any T&G members currently working for an MEP so that we can begin building a network, as well as trying to encourage others to actively seek trade union membership.

Contact Mark Johnson on [Markasthonyjohnson@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:Markasthonyjohnson@hotmail.co.uk)

Printed, promoted and published by T&G Parliamentary Staff Branch, c/o Kevin Flack, Office of Angela E Smith MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA.



Kevin Rodgers, Karen Lawrinson, Matthew Rhodes, Karie Murphy, Carol Wilson, Sam Earl and David Morgan became Regional Officers.

Max Freedman (office of Kate Hoey MP) led the collection of 130 signatures of MPs for EDM 1057 which called for more consultation of the Branch by the House Authorities. At a rally at Labour Party Conference staff, MPs and Union officials such as Andrew Dodgshon called for voluntary recognition of the Branch by the House of Commons, all to no avail.

**FORMAL PETITION OF STAFF OF MPs**

**WHY SHOULD I RETURN THIS POSTCARD?**

Staff on the Parliamentary Estate who don't work in MPs' offices have better holiday and redundancy packages, they have the right to sit down with the House Authorities and be consulted on their pay and other terms and conditions of employment. They also have the right to be recognised for Health & Safety purposes.

Staff working in MPs' offices in Parliament and in constituency offices, on the other hand do not have these rights. Why not? Because we have to show that there is a level of support amongst staff for it.

**This postcard allows YOU the right to indicate your support on this crucial matter.**

**KEY POINTS:**

- You do not have to be a union member to vote – just work in an MP's office.
- A significant number of colleagues from all the political parties have joined the union and want better redundancy conditions and contracts which is why we are conducting this petition.
- This will not interfere with an MP's right to hire the staff they want and to run their offices from day to day.
- This concerns constituency staff as much as staff in parliament.

In accordance with the law this postcard will be given to ACAS an independent organisation, but NOT your employer.

**IT'S TIME TO PUT OURSELVES FIRST FOR ONCE**

**For your vote to count you need to tick the box, complete the card and send it back.**

In 2009 the PLP Liaison Committee was (again) reconstituted and over 750 researchers and 150 MPs and Ministers signed up to support of recognition, many of the signatures collected by Louise Haigh. The Branch argued that the House of Commons had defrauded staff of their right to collective bargaining by claiming not to be their employer, whilst having direct control over standard contracts, paycales, pensions etc.

In April 2009 MPs voted to move to central employment of staff, with the Branch lobbying MPs to ensure the reforms included benefits for staff. The Branch made a submission to the inquiry into MPs' expenses, arguing for reforms to the system of allowances to improve the conditions of employment of staff and increase transparency.

On the 18th June 2009 the Branch celebrated its 25th anniversary with many of the original Branch members attending, and a new voluntary contract for Interns working for MPs was launched.



**THE parliamentary branch of the Transport and General Workers' Union has too many serious MPs' assistants. According to the latest minutes, they agreed by seven votes to four to "have fun" at their Christmas drinks reception.**

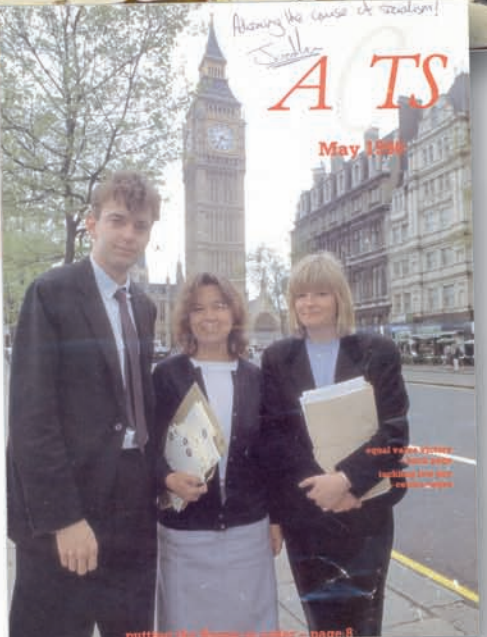




unite  
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# The T&G (Unite)

## Parliamentary Staff Branch History



**MPs' staff want union recognition**

A CROSS-PARTY survey of staff of 159 MPs shows that though the average pay is £20,000, more than 1 in 5 had a real terms pay cut this year, and 1 in 10 believe they earn less than the minimum wage because of unpaid overtime.

The survey was conducted by the Parliamentary Staff Branch of Unite who launch their bid for official union recognition at the party conferences this month.

The event will be at the Labour Party Conference 22nd September.

The survey says 9.2% of respondents believe they receive less than the minimum wage and that 21.8% received either no pay rise, or a pay cut this year.

Wages are as low as £14,000 in London and in constituency offices. 70% say they suffer from stress.

A separate study by the All Party Parliamentary Group on mental health found that 45% of MPs' staff responding to a separate survey had suffered from some form of mental health problem whilst working for an MP.

Launching the campaign for recognition branch secretary Kevin Flack said: 'We hope that MPs will want to set the best possible practice in the employment conditions of everyone who works in Parliament.

'That means decent working practices, as well as decent pay for those who are the first point of contact for often desperate constituents.

'Looking around Parliament this week, it is clear many staff are working as hard in recess as they do the rest of the year, and we are sure those who make the laws will want to set a good example in the treatment of their own staff.'

Branch Photo: Dan Whittle





A Branch Outing to Tolpuddle, Meinir Huws, Janet Pickering, Robbie MacDuff and a young William Pickering (now Parliamentary Officer for EE Ambulance NHS Trust)



Branch members campaigning for nuclear disarmament with Joan Ruddock (then Chair of CND, now a Government Minister)



Kevin Flack and Karl Davies, who went on to be General Secretary of CND



Branch Banner is Unfurled, Gill Morris pours the drinks

## 1983

In the beginning, any member of staff working for a MP either joined the Secretaries and Assistants Council or the T&G1128 Branch, Chaired by Ray Collins (now General Secretary of the Labour Party).

There was no Contract of Employment for MPs' staff, the total staff allowance was £11,364, working conditions were poor and hours long. MPs literally couldn't afford to employ more than one member of staff and had barely enough to cover basic office equipment. Staff had no employment rights. MPs' staff working in Parliament and who were members of the T&G 1/128 Branch felt that they had distinct needs and looked to establish their own Trade Union branch the 1/427 Branch.

The first Branch meeting was held in room W1, Chaired by Janet Pickering, who worked for Jeff Rooker and the Secretary was Jeannette Gould. Founding members included Una Cooze (who worked for Michael Foot), Maureen Fitzhenry (who worked for Bill Michie), Maureen Charleson (who worked for Jo Richardson and Ian Mikado and then Ken Livingstone), Robbie MacDuff (who worked for Allan Roberts), Rosie Winterton and Mike Craven (who both worked for John Prescott), Gill Morris who (worked for Oonagh McDonald), Nigel Stanley (who worked for Brian Gould), Pearl Crisp (who worked for Martin Redmond), David Hill (who worked for Jim Callaghan), Alan Meale (who worked for Michael Meacher) and many more. Una Cooze died in March 2001. Staff organised a memorial to celebrate her life in 7 Millbank which was addressed by Michael Foot, Jeff Rooker, and others. Maureen Fitzhenry has also passed away.

The major challenge for the 1/427 Branch was to secure recognition and employment rights for all staff working for MPs. There were far too many grievances and issues that the Branch took up on behalf of its members relating to pay, conditions and being summarily sacked. What followed was a massive campaign by the Branch to secure a Contract of Employment – whereby staff had rights and conditions of employment – and decent pay.

## 1984

Gill Morris became Branch Secretary. Together with Janet Pickering, Rosie Winterton (Deputy Branch Secretary) and Mike Craven (Deputy Chair) and others,

the Branch embarked on a campaign lobbying their MPs and reporting to their GCs the employment practices of MPs. One of the key problems was the lack of supportive MPs who wanted to support the Branch in its efforts but, fortunately there were some who were prepared to listen and help us fight. In particular, Jeff Rooker, Max Madden and Ernie Ross worked hard to establish a PLP Liaison Committee. Again, the concept of a Contract of Employment met with continued resistance from many MPs.

## 1985 - 87

After much lobbying, high profile grievances and many members wanting to publicise the reality of working for an MP, the PLP Liaison Committee and the Branch forced through a motion to the PLP asking them to support a Contract of Employment for all Members' staff. Members of the Branch leafleted and ensured that their respective MPs were on-side, Letters and leaflets were hand delivered to Members of the Shadow Cabinet and there could be few Labour MPs who weren't aware of the battle but, clearly, the majority were not on side.

Victory! The vote at the PLP went our way. Max Madden delivered the outcome to an emergency meeting of the 1/427 Branch.

This small but significant victory led the way to major reform with MPs having to have recognised Contracts of Employment with their staff. Given the unpopularity of the 1/427 campaign there was a certain irony when previously unsupportive MPs became our advocates.

The 1/427 Branch was being heard loud and clear and the membership was growing and active. The Branch commissioned its own Banner which was unfurled at the Labour Party Conference in Bournemouth by the then T&G General Secretary Ron Todd.

The 1/427 Branch supported many rallies and marches but in particular took inspiration from, and organised many activities to support miners and their families.

Janet Pickering recalls: "There was a strong affiliation with the Ellington NUM and their women's support group. The Branch organised trips to and from Ashington during the disputes and we raised money as well as taking a coach full of gifts for Christmas". Janet was made honorary member of the Northumberland NUM.

Another significant coup for the Branch was its efforts to increase the staffing allowance and to get proper pay scales. The Branch gave evidence to the Administration Committee on working conditions and lobbied hard to secure an increase in the staffing allowance. It achieved another major victory in 1986 – with a 40% increase in the staffing allowance – jumping to £20,140.

## 1987 - 89

The General Election meant that many lost their jobs, including Gill Morris the then Branch Secretaries. Andy Charles (who worked for Chris Smith) and Robbie MacDuff went on to be the Branch Secretary and continued to work to improve the pay and conditions of MPs' staff. The problem was summed up in a Central TV documentary;

"collecting the morning mail is perhaps the easiest task for a day that could last up to 12 hours in the cramped offices off the corridors of power. For some the day could also include being told to pick up laundry, organise holidays and even help the nanny"

## 1990

After the Officers of the British Labour Group of MEPs (now the EPLP) made a decision to reduce the work of its existing staff and bring in new employees, a decision was made by its workforce of 4 to take strike action.

The Branch banner was unfurled on the picket line at the European Parliament building. After two weeks on strike and, after lobbying the MEPs at their group meeting in Brussels, the Branch negotiated a 'back to work' agreement with the Group Secretary, that involved no loss of pay and a re-examination of the restructuring.

Richard Frost, the spokesperson for those on strike recalls: "The solidarity of the action kept us firmly together at the time and for many years since".



1990s



Angela Molloy took over as Branch Secretary from Jonathan Hopkins at the start of the 90s; Kate Davies (who worked for Gavin Strang) was Chair. By 1997, Angela was Chair whilst Siobhan Wilson was Secretary.

Most of the previous committee had moved on to other jobs so it was a baptism of fire for the new committee which quickly grew and included Maureen Fitzhenry,

Lois Blasenheim, Gary Kent, Deborah Clark, Anne Humbles and others.

By this time, the Branch was well established and most of its work during this period was looking towards regularising its position within Parliament and starting the long campaign working towards official recognition. Angela reported “an attitude from MPs that nothing could be done to change the system”, something the Branch would not accept.

The Branch continued to support the miners and took the Branch banner on marches through London. On one occasion, Angela was “shown the door” at the Ritz after taking in the banner on a mission to find refreshment.

Lois Blasenheim hung the banner out to dry in Parliament after it was soaked on a march, which drew disapproving comments from some MPs.

The Branch re-established regular meetings of the PLP Staff Liaison Committee, and redefined its remit to include a sub-committee that could hear grievance and disciplinary cases. This had some successes and acted as a deterrent to MPs. However, it had no legal powers as such, although some members had the contractual right to appeal to it.



At a review of MPs pay and allowances by the SSRB before the 1997 election, the Branch undertook a major survey of all members. The Branch created the “Democracy on the Cheap” report, which they used as evidence. Rebecca Milner and Angela Molloy were instrumental compiling the report. The Branch wrote to all MPs personally on headed paper, citing their case, and urging that they too should give evidence to the review. The Branch followed this up by asking for a slot to give oral evidence at the review, and a team put their case. Neil Gerrard MP also made representations.



Following the review and the SSRB recommendations, the staff salary component of the MPs allowance was ring-fenced for the first time and a central IT system was also set up.

Following the ring-fencing of staff pay, the Fees Office issued a pay scale and, although there are many anomalies in this, which persist today, it was a move in the right direction.

In the late 1990's membership grew significantly and the branch was joined by a large number of new members eager to help the already active branch in pushing forward essential change. Jenny Holland took over temporarily as Chair and was joined by George McNamara who, together with others, carried on the tradition of fighting for improved terms and conditions.

At this point the Branch stepped up its profile by holding regular socials and organising on a regional basis, which increased membership in Constituency offices. The Branch banner was out on a number of marches and the Branch had a good presence in Parliament Square during the Ambulance workers dispute.



George McNamara said: “A march to Downing Street with the Branch banner calling for fair pay for Members staff added to the momentum and determination of Branch members to keep campaigning and making the case for better pay and conditions.”



“We often had fruitless meetings trying to get basic issues such as health and safety and staff development to be considered. However, due to the persistent campaigning of the Branch, many of these ideas and arguments were eventually won.”



Maureen Fitzhenry died suddenly, not long after her retirement. A packed meeting in her memory was held in the Jubilee room, which was attended by her family, staff and MPs. Margaret Beckett MP made a moving tribute.

## 2001 - 2007

The decision by Parliament to provide decent pay, more staff for MPs, better employment procedures, security in Constituency offices and 'ring-fence' the money allocated for staff wages (so you don't have to compete with a new fax machine when asking for your annual wage rise) was the culmination of 20 years' campaigning by the TGWU branch.

The branch gained national status and after two years, Siobhan Wilson took over as Secretary and Angela Molloy moved to the Chair where she remained until 2003/4. After Siobhan left, Kevin Flack took over as Secretary.

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**From the Daily Mirror**

**AN** irate email arrives from "Kevin Flack, Secretary, TGWU Parliamentary Staff Branch 1/427" following my revelation that his branch had decided by seven votes to four to "have fun" at their Christmas drinks reception.

"Please tell me you realised this part of our minutes was a joke!" writes Flack. "I don't know how much you pay for someone to send you our minutes, but perhaps you could pay the branch direct and we could put it in the union benevolent fund."

The branch, Chaired by Joanne Milligan, doubled its membership alongside the large scale 'Pay-Up' campaign for staff wages to be increased automatically by the same percentage as the increase in staffing allowance.

Its membership began to reflect wider support across all political parties and it worked with other groups such as the Lib Dem Staff Group, chaired by Amy Normand.

## 2007 - 2009



Nick Parrot, Max Freedman, Gareth Myton and Sarah Vero



Kevin Flack with the Pay Up Campaign Postcards



Dan Whittle with the former Deputy Leader of the House, Helen Goodman MP



Stuart Watkin and Max Freedman with Jack Jones

Joanne Milligan was followed by Dan Whittle as Chair, with Russell Cartwright as Vice-Chair. In November, the Sergeant at Arms told staff of a recommendation that MPs have "priority access" to services: "staff and other users should be prepared to give way to Members when queuing for retail and catering services etc."

More than 150 secretaries and researchers squeezed into a Commons Committee Room with more unable to get in, to say that they thought the rules an insult. The Times reported that: "Politicians have been taught a humiliating lesson in courtesy by their own employees."

Lembit Opik, presenting a petition to Parliament said "The 380 signatories know that the staff keep this place running in the democratic interests of the country. I thank Unite, the Union, for its tireless efforts on this campaign and hope that the Administration Committee will soon abandon the regime of common discourtesy and restore courtesy to the Commons." As yet the convention remains.

In 2008 Adam Leeder, James Green and Stacey Vickers later joined by Tulip Siddiq, created a Branch Interns Network to organise the growing number of interns in offices of MPs. Gareth Myton (who worked for Jim Cousins MP and the NUT) helped establish a Caseworker of the Year Award to honour the work of Caseworkers helping Constituents, often in extremely difficult circumstances. Lisa Johnson who worked for