

EQUITY

Minutes of Greater Manchester Branch hybrid Meeting held 7pm 28/2/2023 at Manchester Mechanics Institute and on Zoom

Present: Paul Liversey (Equity NW Regional Organiser), Andrew Whiteside (Equity NW Organiser & Admin Assistant), Gareth Forest (Equity Campaigns Officer), Victoria Brazier (Equity NW Area Councillor), Chris Clarkson, Hazel Roy, Lucas Cheong Smith, Chris Kerry, Matthew Heywood, Rachel Beach, Dan Willis, David Cockayne, Amy Drake, Kathy Francis, Hayley Cartwright, Linda Beckett, Tilly Sutcliffe, Susanna Amato, Andrew C. Husband, Gary Thompstone, Johnny McGarritty, Imogen Khan, Jamie Byron, Roberta Kerr, Alexis Tuttle, Yasemine Gravitas, Andrew Santanna.

Apologies for absence: Noreen Kershaw, Sebastian Taylor, Kerry Willison-Parry.

Chairperson's Opening Remarks

Paul Liversey opened the meeting, explaining that until the Branch formally appointed its Transitional Committee, there was currently no officers in place, so as the Regional officer he would chair the meeting *pro tem* until the Meeting decided one for themselves from the floor. He read out the Equity Safe Spaces Statement to the Meeting, then asked if anyone present wanted to Chair the meeting. Victoria Brazier put herself forward and this was Agreed unanimously. Victoria then took the Chair.

Previous Minutes

These had been circulated and were proposed as a true record by Andrew C. Husband and seconded by Chris Clarkson and Agreed by the meeting.

Appointment of Transitional Committee

Since the Inaugural Meeting, the Equity NW Office had written out to all the members of the new Branch seeking nominations for the Transitional Committee that will help set up and run the Branch until elections later on in the year. As a result, the following nine members of the Branch had sent in valid Nomination forms with confirmation from proposers and seconders by close of nominations;

Hazel Roy
Jamie Byron
Victoria Brazier
Chris Clarkson*
Tilly Sutcliffe

Lucas Cheong Smith
Susanna Amato
Dan Willis
Robert Jackson

**Chris Clarkson self-identifies as Variety*

As there were nine valid nominations for the nine positions, they automatically become the Transitional Committee.

Motions to Conference

Paul explained that under the rule changes, the procedure for motions to the renamed Equity Conference had changed. Whilst Branches could debate as many valid motions as were received, they are only entitled to send ONE motion to the NW Area Meeting, which all NW Branch members are entitled to attend and vote on motions from all three NW Branches. The NW Area Meeting will therefore decide on ONE motion from the NW Branches to send to Equity Conference in London in May.

Three motions had been received for consideration. Paul explained that each one would be moved and seconded, and voted on its own merits, but then the meeting would then need to vote for one motion of the three (or however many were passed) to go forward to the NW Area Meeting in March.

Motion 1.

Conference notes that in an ideal world, all of our members would work on Equity agreed terms and conditions, and we recognise that the union is working hard to achieve this ideal.

However conference is aware that a number of companies have withdrawn from Equity agreements in recent years and are then offering contracts on less favourable terms and conditions.

Whenever this happens, the union should take strong and visible action, not only contacting the company itself but also the Arts Council if the company is in receipt of public funding, local government and trade press, as well as announcing to members and the wider industry.

Conference therefore urges Council to devise and publish a clear, public and widespread plan of action when a company withdraws from an Equity agreement.

Mover: Lucas Cheong Smith

Secunder: Tilly Sutcliffe

For the Motion: 19

Against: 0

Abstentions: 2

CARRIED

Motion 2.

Conference notes that cuts in public funding to the arts and culture have led to a reduction in the job opportunities for Equity members. This, added to the major hike in energy bills and the overall increase in the cost of living means that members face

an ever more precarious future. However, conference also notes that our members are not alone in facing an uncertain future. The ongoing action by members of trade unions throughout the labour movement demonstrates that workers in the public sector, nurses, fire brigade, civil servants, lawyers, teachers, and rail employees are all willing and confident to take strike action to protect jobs, pay and other terms and conditions.

Conference notes that the emergence of the Enough is Enough campaign represents a real opportunity for collaborative action between trade unionists, tenants' associations, environmentalists, and refugee groups who, faced with an increasingly incompetent recalcitrant government and a vacillating opposition, need a unified umbrella campaign like never before. Conference therefore welcomes Council's decision to affiliate Equity to the Enough is Enough campaign. However given the current economic and industrial climate conference urges Council to find ways to increase the profile of the Enough is Enough campaign, and Equity's involvement with it, and encourage more of our members to get involved. Unity is strength.

Mover: Hazel Roy

Secunder: Chris Clarkson

For: 10

Against: 0

Abstentions: 5

CARRIED

At this point, Equity's Campaigns Officer Gareth Forest had joined via Zoom, and the Meeting voted to suspend Standing Orders to allow him to report on the campaign to save Oldham Coliseum. He reported as follows;

Equity called a public meeting on Tues 21 February to hold the Arts Council England (ACE) to account over its decision to defund Oldham Coliseum. We wanted this to be a forum where our members and the general public could ask questions from ACE, Oldham Council and Coliseum management about what had happened, and get clarity on many of the conflicting public statements about the Coliseum.

400 people turned out, and speakers like Maxine Peake, Zoe Iqbal, and Paul Hilton talked about why this theatre was important to them. ACE declined to attend and we symbolically empty chaired them on stage. The event achieved significant [local](#), regional and national press coverage and social media attention, which made it clear that Equity was fighting for our members and holding ACE to account. It was clearly a cathartic moment for many in the audience, the first opportunity many of them had to have their say about what the theatre means to them. Much credit to the Manchester branch for turning out to help steward such a big event, and to Victoria for chairing an emotionally charged meeting. All attendees signed a public petition which Lynda Rooke delivered the next morning to ACE offices in Manchester, to [more press coverage from ITV](#).

Victoria, Paul Liversey and Gareth Forest held talks with Oldham Council immediately before the public meeting, where they gave no commitments to sending a

representative, but they immediately issued a press release afterwards about plans for the new theatre that were inaccurate and show clear deficiencies in future provision for performing arts. The Arts Council felt forced in the following days to issue [a new statement](#) on Oldham which claimed it was an irresponsible use of public money to continue to fund the Coliseum. We followed this with the release of a public video of our meeting calling on the Arts Council to do the right thing. [You can view it here](#)

This all shows that we are having an effect on the key decision makers, and they are feeling forced to respond to our campaigning.

This meeting was followed by Equity calling for people to attend the Council's public question time on Monday night, where Chris Clarkson put nine questions to the Council that Equity had submitted. Campaigners packed out the public gallery for the first time in the Council's recent history. We didn't get the answers we wanted, but we demonstrated to the Council that the union was a force to be reckoned with and showed them that they needed to deliver on their commitments to a new theatre.

We plan to refocus the campaign on the Arts Council as the key decision maker to end this crisis, and force them to release ringfenced money to the Coliseum, to save jobs and the theatre company. We'll announce the next campaign actions in consultation with the regional official and councillor in due course.

All this campaigning has forced the council to engage in private talks with Equity, and for the Arts Council to offer us a private meeting to discuss the issue. We are clear this has only happened because of the union's campaign, and we believe this shows there is room for manoeuvre.

Motion 3.

This Annual Representative Conference believes that what would help all theatre artists is an understanding of theatre economics. How fringe/subsidised/commercial structures work and what makes it possible/impossible to make work in those different areas of the sector and what you can expect from them. By creating quarterly meetings (online) with producers and theatre their own projects. This Annual Representative Conference calls upon Council to rally members across all branches in the UK to create forums for artists and creative practitioners to meet various producers who are willing to impart their knowledge on applications for funding, budgeting, pay, commissions and more. The greater the information from experienced individuals the greater the knowledge for our members.

Mover: Jamie Byron

Secunder: Susanna Amato

For: 16

Against: 0

Abstentions: 4

CARRIED

Paul Liversey stated that there should now be a vote to decide which of the three motions should go forward to the NW Area Meeting, with each member only voting once for one motion.

David Cockayne raised a point of order that the successful motion should receive 50% of the vote by exhaustive ballot. Victoria Brazier proposed that this method be used and the meeting AGREED.

In Round 1 of voting, Motion 1 received sixteen votes, Motion 2 received one vote and Motion 3 received four votes; Motion 2 was therefore eliminated.

In Round 2, Motion 1 received seventeen votes and Motion 3 received four votes. Motion 1 will therefore go through to the NW Area Meeting.

Members asked if the unsuccessful motions could still be sent to Council. Paul Liversey explained that under the new Standing Orders, only one of the motions could be sent to Council; the other one would need to be brought back to a later Meeting. The two remaining motions were therefore voted on as follows; Motion 2 received one vote with eighteen abstentions, while Motion 3 received eighteen votes with one abstention. Motion 3 will therefore be sent to Council.

Arrangements for Future Meetings

The next branch meeting will be on Wednesday 19th April. Venue TBC after the committee have had their meeting.

Any Other Business

Sam Ellis mentioned that the forthcoming 'Future of Theatre' Conference would be addressed by the Head of Arts Council England and would therefore be an excellent opportunity to lobby on behalf of Oldham Coliseum. Paul Liversey confirmed that Paul Fleming would be there on behalf of Equity and so that would absolutely happen. The forthcoming Equity Drag Network event on March 6th organised by Robert Lugg was mentioned, and Victoria gave a brief Council report on issues such as the 17% campaign and the new Equity website.

The Meeting closed at 8.46pm