



Celebrating 125 Years

125 years ago this year, workers met in Manchester and Birmingham to establish trade unions, which grew during the latter part of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century, to form, in 1947, what is now the **Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers**.

Throughout the last 125 years there have been many struggles and the Union can claim success in ending the 'living in' system, the establishment of Wages Councils, successfully resisting constant attacks on shops legislation as well as securing substantial improvements for members in what have often been very difficult times.

Much of Usdaw's strength has stemmed from the combined activity of its reps and staff who have devoted their time and energy to the benefit of others and continue to do so to this day.



The representatives of 11 shop assistants' organisations met in 1891 to form the National Union of Shop Assistants.



Usdaw
Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers

For further reading visit www.usdaw.org.uk/history to see A Union of Many Trades – W. Richardson They Also Serve – P.C. Hoffman 1891–1991: Usdaw – A Century of Service



Usdaw Fact File

- Members fought in World War II and 2,047 members lost their lives in the forces. In addition, 140 civilian members were killed in bombing attacks on Britain. Members of the Union, male and female, were often compulsorily transferred into essential industries. A former grocer could find himself in a shipyard, or a milliner find herself in a tank factory.
- Usdaw is the fastest growing union in the country today, with over 440,000 members and is the fourth largest trade union in the UK.
- Usdaw has to recruit in excess of 70,000 members each year just to keep its membership figure static!
- Usdaw's record in the wider trade union and labour movement is well recorded, with many members and officials making both Parliamentary and TUC history.





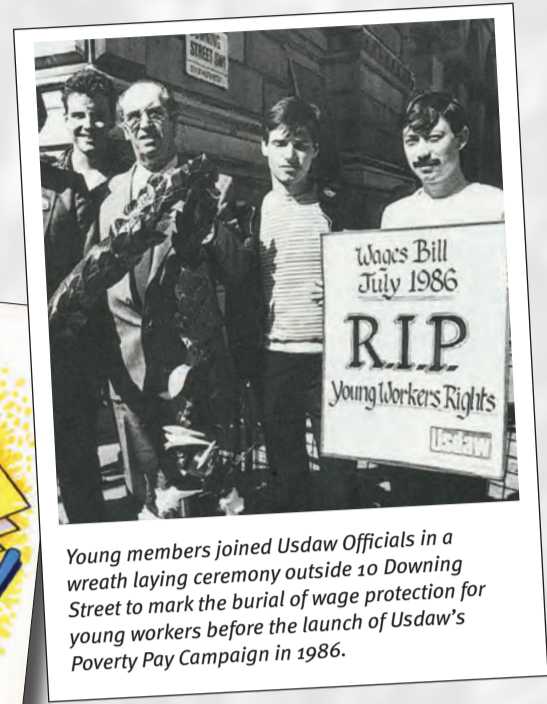
Organising for Better Pay

In the late 1800s, trade unions were formed because of the poverty and insecurity of the working classes and in particular, the working hours, conditions and wages of retail workers were among the worst experienced.

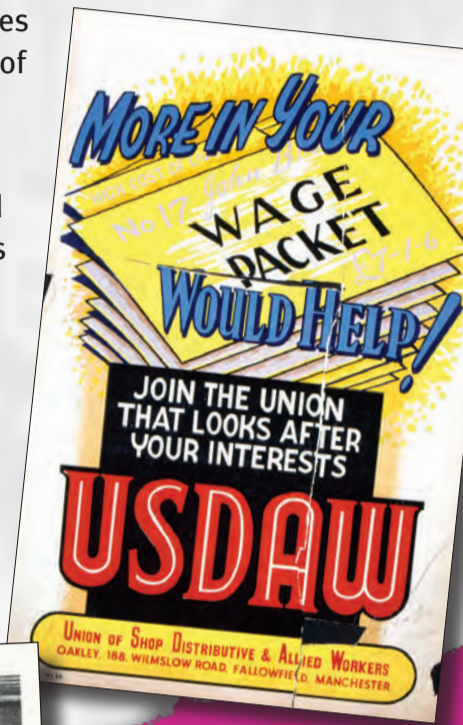
Over the years, there have been a variety of systems of wage controls such as the Trade Boards Act 1909 and Wages Councils. Usdaw played a leading part in the introduction of the National Minimum Wage flagship policy of the Labour Party during its 1997 election campaign.

Usdaw helps people at work by negotiating better pay and conditions. Every year the Union negotiates improvements to pay for hundreds of thousands of members.

Usdaw believes that the new 'National Living Wage', announced in 2015, should be paid at 18 and not 25. We do not believe that a lower rate for workers under 25 is justified when they are doing the same job. Over the last two decades, Usdaw has ensured the adult rate is paid to all staff in the big retailers and in the vast majority of companies we represent members in.



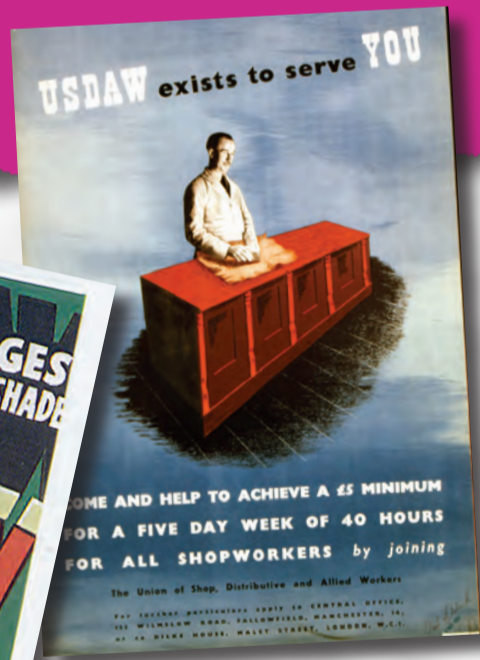
Young members joined Usdaw Officials in a wreath laying ceremony outside 10 Downing Street to mark the burial of wage protection for young workers before the launch of Usdaw's Poverty Pay Campaign in 1986.



The period running up to the First World War was one of unparalleled industrial unrest in Britain. Over the years, actions by the NAUSA&C secured union agreements and better pay with hundreds of companies throughout the country.

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- Employees in unionised workplaces earn, on average, more than those in non-unionised ones.
- In 1961, Woolworth stores in South Wales and Monmouthshire refused to negotiate with the Union for wage improvements or grant facilities for collecting Union dues. The women marched out of the stores in protest and the company almost immediately announced the introduction of a revised wage scale in their 1,060 stores.





Improving Workers' Lives by Campaigning

Usdaw and its predecessors have campaigned hard and long to prevent the exploitation of members. From its earliest days this Union has always been involved in campaigning, but as we began the second hundred years of our existence the methods we used and the image we projected became more advanced – turning Usdaw into ‘The Campaigning Union’. Our recent past is a solid record of involving more and more members in pressing for specific improvements to our working lives – from raising health and safety standards to opposing seven day/24 hour shopping, from promoting a legal minimum wage to demanding equal pay for work of equal value.

These are just a few things that the Union campaigns for... Usdaw is not known as ‘The Campaigning Union’ for nothing! We are always driving forward to improve workers’ lives and win for our members.



Thousands of Usdaw members took to the streets to demonstrate against cuts to the National Health Service.



Usdaw runs high profile innovative campaigns in workplaces on other issues such as Pensions Awareness, Supporting Parents and Carers, Young Workers, Freedom From Fear, Equalities and fair treatment for all. Another successful campaign is Lifelong Learning which aims to provide members, some of whom feel they struggled at school, with the chance to get back into learning both for their own personal development and to improve their career opportunities.



In its 125th year Usdaw is partnering with Mencap to help raise money and raise awareness of the charity in the industries that Usdaw organises in.



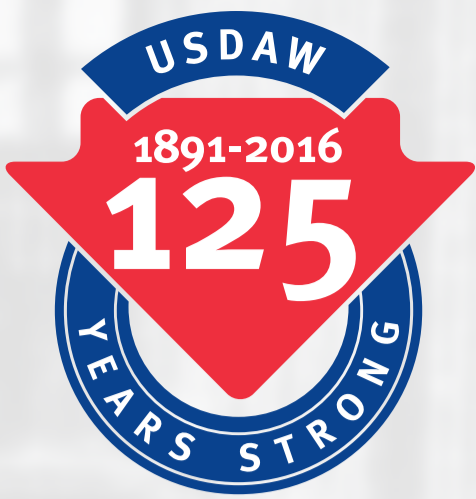
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- In the 1990s, the Union was instrumental in committing the Labour Government to introduce a National Minimum Wage and we are continuing the fight to increase this further.
- During the General Strike of 1926 both the NAUSA&C and NUDAW supported the miners. NUDAW was part of the ‘Triple Alliance’ of mining, steel and transport unions, playing a very active role.
- The 1950s and 60s saw an increase in consumer demand for all types of goods and services which led to new areas of potential growth for Usdaw. Membership grew not only in the distribution trades but also in food processing and milk industries, as well as in parts of the pharmaceutical and related chemical industries.





Organising for Equality

Usdaw has a proud record of opposing discrimination at all levels of society. The Union works tirelessly to support members and reps both to promote equality and end discrimination in all its forms and to ensure workplaces are fairer and have good equalities policies.

Usdaw's current campaigns include Supporting Young Workers, LGBT, Black and Asian Workers and Parents and Carers.



Famous Usdaw Women



Mary Macarthur rebelled against her middle-class upbringing. In 1901 she attended a meeting of the NAUSAW&C to write a scathing article for the Tory Press, but instead was overwhelmed by the plight of shop assistants and was immediately converted.

She quickly became Chair of Ayr branch and in 1903 was elected onto the Union's National Executive.

She left to form the National Federation of Women Workers, becoming its General Secretary. Her early death in 1921 was a great loss to women's trade unionism.



Margaret Bondfield became assistant secretary of the NAUSAW&C around the turn of the 20th century. She brought the plight of shop assistants and the 'living-in' system to the public eye.

Posing as a drapery assistant and moving from store to store, Margaret Bondfield worked 'under cover' to supply information first-hand to the Daily Chronicle. She later became Labour MP for Northampton and the country's first woman Cabinet Minister.



Ellen Wilkinson – or 'Red Ellen' as she was best known – became the AUCE's first woman organiser in 1915, setting up a special women's department to encourage women to play a more active role.

She went on to become Labour MP for Middlesbrough East in 1924, and for Jarrow in 1935. She went on to lead the men of that town on their unforgettable hunger march to London. In 1945 she became Minister of Education after Labour's landslide victory.

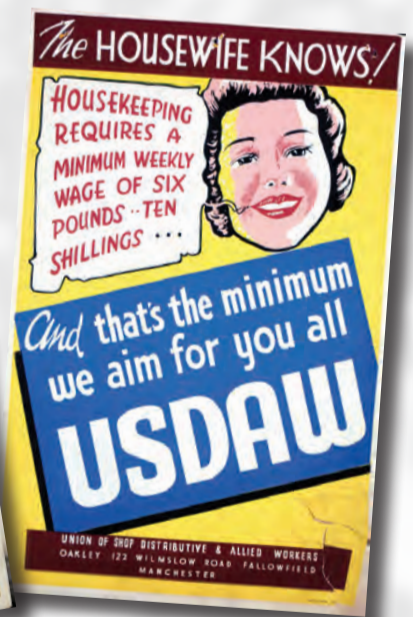
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- In 1918 women did get a reward of sorts for their efforts. The vote if over 30 – and the sack from their jobs when the men returned from the war!
- The Union's fight for equal pay goes back to the First World War.
- In the 1980s, Sainsbury checkout operator, Geraldine O'Sullivan, was backed by Usdaw at an industrial tribunal to gain parity with men in the warehouse. This resulted in a job evaluation exercise which raised the women's pay and other employers followed suit.



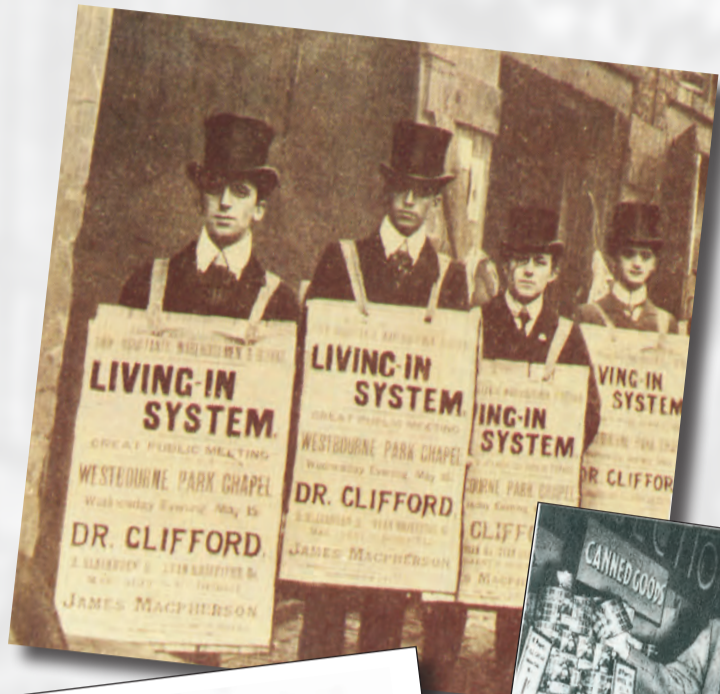


Organising for Better Rights at Work

In 1891 retailing employed 750,000 workers, many of them ruthlessly exploited. Brutally long working hours for low pay was the norm and a 70 to 80 hour week was not uncommon. Two-thirds of the workforce were also subject to the 'living in' system, where shopkeepers paid them partly in wages and partly by providing board and lodging. Against this background union activity in shops began and rapidly spread.

In addition to low pay and 'living in', shop opening hours were of great concern and remain so to this day. Since the mid-sixties there were numerous attempts to introduce reform of the 1950s Shops Act. Usdaw's campaign helped their demise. Usdaw played a key role in defeating the Conservative Government's 1985 Shops Bill which would have legalised unlimited shopping hours seven days a week.

Usdaw works tirelessly to get members better holiday entitlement, good pension provision and improved arrangements for time off work. By negotiating with employers the Union is able to make life at work better for its hundreds of thousands of members.



The introduction of self-service was a new innovation for customers as well as for shopworkers. An Usdaw survey in 1954 found that shopworkers generally welcomed the change.

"For two years – the most miserable years of my life – I was behind the counter of a draper's shop. I am in favour of compulsory early closing because it is, I am convinced, absolutely impossible to make the shopping class understand what a serious matter late shopping is."

H.G. Wells (1902)

"I can assure you of my warm sympathy with the grocers' assistants. It seems to me that the only improvement in the conditions of their work must come from co-operation with a view to reduction of hours."

Dr Conan Doyle (1902)

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The reasons given by shopkeepers for the dismissal of their staff, or by staff for giving notice, were often curious; sometimes ludicrous or grimly humorous. Generally, they throw a light on the conditions of employment in shops over a century ago. The following 'reasons' for dismissal have been taken from cases that passed through the NAUSAW&C head office all those years ago.

1. Woman (27 years of age) engaged as assistant – ordered to do housework in addition. Hours, 7 am to 11 pm. Gave notice.
2. Dismissed. Told he had no right to look for another job while he had one.
3. Dismissed, man, 23 years of age, for having candle in bedroom.
4. Dismissed for carrying matches in pocket.
5. Dismissed for charging a pennyworth of gum tablets to wrong department.
6. Dismissed for being ill one day.
7. Man (30 years of age) dismissed for getting married.
8. Woman (23 years of age). "I had to give notice on account of the food being so bad, and young ladies who had not very good characters. I did not wish to lose my good character."
9. Man – 'living in' – dismissed. Complained of condition of sleeping apartment, where water dripped onto bed from ceiling.
10. Dismissed for refusing to sleep in bedroom with unclean person.
11. Dismissed for going through wrong door to dinner.
12. "Guv'nor objected to me as a prospective son-in-law."
13. Asked for two days' leave to return home to arrange for and attend funeral and was dismissed.
14. Dismissed for bringing a sandwich to work.
15. Caught in the act of serving a customer!
16. "New employers regretted to find they had engaged me without having a vacancy."
17. Employer got a relative to work for less wages.
18. "Held responsible for shortage of stock while I was on holiday."
19. Because customer would not conform to rule of establishment and wait for receipt from the cash desk.
20. Alleged defiance – singing in bedroom.
21. Refused to sleep any longer on the pledge counter.
22. "Dismissed because I would not shout in the street."
23. For eating a scone at teatime. The preference for this rather than bread and butter was regarded as a personal insult.
24. For becoming engaged to a young lady employed by the same firm.
25. Stock short £2 4s. Previous stock was £2 4s over.
26. Dismissed. Employer doesn't quite know why.
27. For doing too much work. Grocery trade.

Usdaw Fact File

- In 1914, 400,000 workers still 'lived in'. One of the main arguments put forward was that 'living in' protected women and discouraged immorality.
- 'Living in' lingered on into the 1920s when, after a long campaign, most workers had won the right to choose between taking board and being paid a full wage.
- As the Jarrow marchers passed through Leicester, NUDAW members from the Co-op's shoe repairing plant worked through the night, without pay, to mend 112 pairs of boots. The cost of materials was paid for by the Union and put the marchers back on their feet.





Making Workplaces Safer

Keeping members safe at work is one of the key aims of the Union. This involves everything from ensuring safe working practices and environments, safety training, ensuring the supply of personal protective equipment and advising members and reps on all other aspects of safety at work.

Thanks to the efforts of trade unions, health and safety in the workplace has progressed beyond recognition – people are no longer expected to work in dangerous conditions and workplace policies and procedures introduced over the years have saved thousands of lives.



Shop assistants leapt from the top floor of this dormitory when fire broke out. One assistant died when she fell onto the signboard.

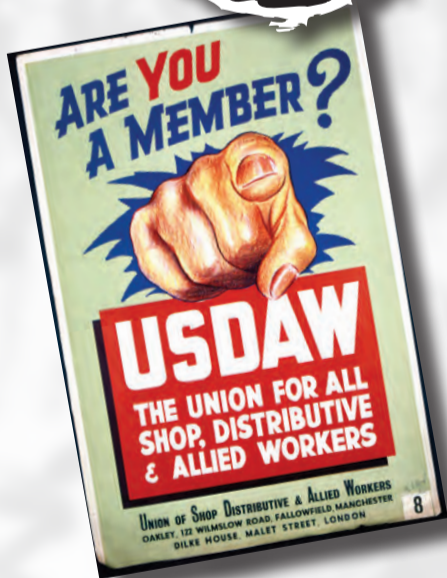
A shop owner sued by the local sanitary inspector for having a carcase on his premises unfit for human consumption appealed and got off on the grounds that the meat was not for sale – it was for the staff!

Today Usdaw's award winning Freedom From Fear Campaign seeks to prevent violence, threats and abuse against workers and Usdaw has numerous campaigns to protect and support areas of health and safety at work including temperature, stress, bullying, driving, lone working and domestic violence.



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- With 5,000 trained Health and Safety Reps Usdaw makes sure that safety at work is taken seriously.
- You are twice as likely to have an accident in a workplace where there isn't a union.

