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Activate: The impact of Jane McAlevey on PCS

Activist, educator and trade union organiser Jane McAlevey died on 7 July. Hear from recent PCS graduates from her organising for power course to see how the union incorporates many of her powerful organising ideas.

Jane had an immeasurable impact on PCS, training hundreds of activists and staff across our union in the methods and techniques that put workers at the centre of struggle, and gives them the tools they need to win.

Organising for power: core fundamentals is a six-week intensive, global online training course, running each May and June for the last five years. Since 2019, Organising for power (O4P)'s core fundamentals course has trained over 35,000 union reps and other activists worldwide in 'core' organising methods, including many of our own activists in PCS.

Over the last decade, PCS has consciously incorporated many of the organising ideas of Jane and O4P into much of the trade union education we deliver to reps and members. All those involved in PCS, whether as reps, officers, staff, or advocates, have a role to play in educating members, non-member colleagues, friends, and family about how strong unions can transform the workplace, and wider society, for the better.

Dan Durcan from the DEFRA London & SE branch, who was encouraged to join the organising for power course in preparation for the 2022/3 industrial campaign, explains how Jane's work "transformed" his "expectations of trade unionism" – her ideas going from "theory to practise to help our group deliver some of the strongest mandates for industrial action across PCS".

"We immediately applied the lessons from the course to run a strike petition, contacting hundreds of members in structured conversations," he says. "We delivered a petition to the new secretary of state on their first full day in the office, sending a warning shot about low pay that was heard through Whitehall."

Difficult conversations

Jane's methods were sometimes controversial, always challenging – imploring organisers to get out of their comfort zone and have the difficult conversations with the people that we, as a movement, need to win to the cause.

As Dan puts it: “Jane's work sets an astonishing high bar for success. This may seem daunting at first, but only reflects the challenges the trade union movement faces. We need to have these high expectations of ourselves; to constantly experiment with different ways of talking to members and non-members, to drive up membership and density, and push forward with ambition and self-confidence.”

Jane was always quick to remind activists that the methods and techniques which she taught are not her own – they were the strategies developed and employed by union organisers in the hey-day of militant union activity.

Simmeron Katbamna from the London branch of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (and chair of the national young members' committee) says that she has used Jane's teachings to “agitate in the workplace, build majorities, and take stands against the employer”.

“I'm more confident talking to members, both about the union in general and the personal issues they're facing, and how to move people to action to take control of their circumstances,” she says, adding that she's also had the “privilege of teaching O4P techniques to fellow young members in training sessions”.

Although Jane's passing is a tragic loss to the movement, Simmeron concludes, “her spirit lives on in the new layer of activists her methods continue to empower and inspire”.

You can read another [short tribute to Jane](#) on the PCS website.