

YEOVIL & DISTRICT TRADES UNION COUNCIL

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Minutes of the **Meeting** held Wednesday 18th March 2009 At Unity Hall Yeovil BA20 1JL

Present: Bill Byrd, Unite/Amicus; Chriss Dennett Unite/Amicus; Brian Macrae, Unite/Amicus; Vivian Willis, Unite/Amicus; Brian Wadsworth, Unite/Amicus; Dave Osborne, Unite/Amicus; Rex Brown, Unite/Amicus; Joe Conway, Unite/TGWU; Dave Symington, Unite/Amicus; Pete Joyce, Unison; Mark Hoskins, PCS; and Ken Keable, Prospect (Visitor)

1. Apologies: Neal Ware, Unite/TGWU and Colin Stewart, Unite/TGWU.

2. Minutes of the last meeting were read and accepted as a correct and true record.

3. Matters arising: The Yeovil 50+ Forum has set a date, Thursday 14th May 2009, for National Pensioners Convention spokesman, Neal Duncan Jordan, who will give a talk at the South Street Centre. The meeting starts at 14:30hrs.

The secretary received a letter from Rob Miller of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign thanking us for the £777 we raised for them. The difference was raised by CSC themselves at the Cuba night, bringing the total towards a £1000.

May Day event to focus on a "Hope not hate – love music hate racism" theme; given the fascist BNP are likely to put up candidates in the European Parliament and County Council elections in June; that we get a suitable band, we make enquiries to "Seize the Day"; a film/DVD; involve the SWTUC and Searchlight South West.

4. Discussion on the credit crisis; this produced a quality debate. Delegate expressed concern at the rising level of mass unemployment; official figures today state 2M. Some research has it that for everyone person signed on the "Job seekers allowance" there are five others "economically inactive" half of all men aged over 50 are not working, while vacancies are falling at an alarming rate; the crisis is very similar to the "crash" of 1929.

In 1858, in an article for the New York Tribune, *Karl Marx* wrote:

"the recent commercial crisis in this country as well as in America and the North of Europe, was mainly owing to excessive speculation and the abuse of credit...What are the social circumstances producing, almost regularly, these seasons of general self-delusion, of over-speculation and fictitious credit? If they were once traced out, we should arrive at a very plain alternative. Either they may be controlled by society, or they are inherent in the present system of production. In the first case, society may avert crises; in the second, so long as the system lasts, they must be borne with, like the natural changes of the season."

At the end of World War Two, the Country was short of money, but the NHS was formed, council houses built, the Bretton Woods agreement was set up, a financial system based on fixed exchange rates. However, this came to an end in 1971 in Britain when, with the USA, opted for floating exchange rates of currencies, and the conditionality of the IMF loan to Britain in 1976 paved the way for neo-liberalism.

Debate also focussed on the state of the Labour Party currently controlled by a cabal of neo-liberals. What is required is to end the pro- corporate anti welfare consensus of the three main parties.

5. Officers reports: The President reported on redundancies at Airbus in Bristol affecting over 200 workers: that an agreement had been worked out, that allowed a "secondment" of some of these workers to fill skilled posts at Agusta/Westland. This would take priority over agency workers.

The Secretary reported on the letter sent to David Laws MP ref: Royal Mail, our resolution and calling for his support for Early Day Motion 428(EDM). The upshot of his reply was that he thanked us for the letter, but did not mention EDM 428, therefore not supporting it. He sent the Liberal Democrats policy paper on the future of the Royal Mail; this would support the universal service obligation, but would not support the status quo.

To date not sent off the TUC registration form, but to run by the delegates present the approximate costs of sending a delegate to Eastbourne for this years Annual National Conference of Trades Union Councils' would be about £150. The meeting agreed the secretary attends.

Notice of a National demonstration, Assemble Victoria Embankment from 11am, Saturday 28th March 2009; to coincide with the G20 meeting held in the Capital the following week, under the theme "March for Jobs, Justice and Climate" Supported by many TUC affiliated Trade Unions, NGO's, Charities and new social, environment, anti-capitalist and anti-war movements. <http://www.putpeoplefirst.org.uk>

The **Treasurer** reported that the account stands at £587.68 , and had received £6.50 from Community and £5 from PCS fro this years affiliation. He called for branches and Unions to re-affiliate.

Dave also gave a report on "Skills for the future"

Delagate: SWTUC Green Workplaces Project Worker Frances Robertson will address the Yeovil Trades Council about opportunities to go green at work at its meeting at the Unity Hall on Wednesday 15th April at 7.30p.m. All welcome. The TUC Green Workplaces project team can be contacted on 0117 947 0521.

Delegates, Dave Osborne and Vivian Willis to the SWTUC Annual General meeting of Trades Union Council presented a joint report on the meeting:

SWTUC AGM of Trades Union Councils: Yeovil TUC delegates report. Taunton New Library March 6th 2009.

Opening remarks from the Chair, Andy Robertson touched on the crisis of capitalism, 0% pay rises, and an opportunity for Trades Union Councils to present themselves on the issues.

1. Apologies: Joe Conway, Yeovil TUC.

2. Minutes of the last AGM are accepted as correct and true record.

3. Matters arising: Dave Osborne asked about progress on the motion passed last year about reinvigorating Trades Councils. There have been 2 or 3 attempts to get the sub-committee to meet on the issue of the role of Trades Union Councils, particularly on the victory of securing representation of TUC's at the Annual Trades Union Congress. Yeovil Trades Council also raised a motion at the TUC Regional Council calling for Trades Councils to be better publicised on TUC websites. Some delegates expressed their concerns of "meetings overload", However, the sub-committee (the "SWTUC Working party on Trades Union Councils") will meet on Saturday 18th April 2009 @ Unity Hall, Yeovil.

A time consuming technical issue was aired over the registration of Plymouth and Cornwall TUC. They have not registered with the TUC for sometime now, and technicalities would ensue over nominations and voting; Tom Mellish, TUC Organising Policy Officer (taken over from Sean Beanford), made it clear that if they have not registered they can't vote and nominate. There was no delegate from Plymouth and Cornwall. The meeting decided that someone – Dave Chapple volunteered to find out what the problems are; also to find out what the status of Poole and Bournemouth TUC.

Election of reserve delegates to the SWTUC Regional Council took place, there were six candidates, and delegates present were allowed to vote up to five candidates. Successful candidates were Nigel Behan, Taunton TUC; Helen Harris, Salisbury TUC; Mike Langley, Bristol TUC and Leigh Redman FBU, Bridgwater TUC. The unsuccessful candidate was Mark Deveraux from Exeter TUC.

On a more substantive issue, the meeting called for a quality professional leaflet highlighting the role Trades Union Councils. The meeting thought that some TU recruiting materials were not very good and unions not responsive in providing them when asked by Trades Councils, and that TU leadership should be more pro-active in encouraging Branches to affiliate to Trades Councils (it was noted that Unite are good in this respect). Tom Mellish, who is a Trades Council member himself, said that TUC recognises that Trades Councils have an important role in Organising; a new leaflet will be produced and TUC websites updated to give better information regarding the Trades Council movement. At this juncture he gave a talk on "The case for the organising agenda". Nigel Costley said that despite the anti-union laws we have some of the most union friendly laws in the world.

Over 3000 new recognition agreements since 1995, but the rate of recognition agreements is slowing down; that 51% of TU members are women, 49% men. There are currently 6.7M members, by far the largest membership base of any organisation in the country. The flip side is something like 19M workers are not in a Union. Currently only 36% of the workforce is covered by collective agreement. There are more members in the private sector than the public sector, though 77% of private sector workplaces have no TU members. Only 8% have a density of 50% or more. Globally the picture is mixed, Bahrain and China has seen an increase of 25%, Sweden has a decrease of 2% - 25%, the UK is about stable.

What does it mean for workers? In recent years there has seen a dramatic rise in directors pay compared to that of workers. NUT, PCS, RMT and USDAW has seen an increase in membership, while the TGWU and Prospect has seen a significant fall in membership. The rise in the public sector is probably down to government investment, while the decline in the private sector reflects the movement of manufacturing jobs to other countries.

We should remind ourselves as to what we do: pay and conditions, a voice and respect at work, promote health and safety, education and skills, equality, pensions and progressive social policy.

Key challenges:

- the retention of workers to remain members; to recruit and organise in the workplace.
- To extend our influence where we have no union recognition.
- To recruit more stewards and reps and revitalise local union structures.
- To become more relevant to members

A delegate came in at this point who conducted some research of his own that suggested there are private sector companies that have recognition agreements – but no members.

- To shift more resources into organising.
- Ask how does what we do strengthen the union?
- Key objectives to include: growth in membership, growth of activists, Stewards and Reps. At this juncture many delegates called for the repeal of all anti-union and anti-strike laws including ourselves. Given the experience of the sacking of Deputy Convenor Jerry Hicks at RR Patchway Bristol and Unison Branch secretary of Somerset County Branch Secretary, unless we have power at work through going on or potentially taking industrial action, how do we turn around the crisis of confidence and the culture of fear currently pervading the movement? Nigel Costley and Tom Mellish said we can do a great deal despite the legislation and we must not use that as an excuse for inaction.
- We have to work harder in our own respective unions.
- "Partnership" has had it's day, it is one sided.

6. Local matters: This quarter's newsletter: there are non-technical printing problems with the CLP copier, that recent usage has pushed up the costs all round, and the print quality is not that good either. In the light of this we get a quotation from professional printers for 200 copies; would be ideal to have them ready for circulation for the May Day event.

7. Press release: TUC Green workplaces, SAVE ENERGY SAVE MONEY WITH THE TUC

SWTUC Green Workplaces Project Worker Frances Robertson will address the Yeovil Trades Council about opportunities to go green at work at its meeting at the Unity Hall on Wednesday 15th April at 7.30p.m. All welcome.

Background

At the February meeting of Yeovil Trades Union Council, Dave Osborne (Treasurer and delegate to the South West TUC Regional Council) told delegates about the Briefing Session he had recently attended on Coping with the Economic Downturn. As part of that Briefing Session Frances Robertson from the TUC Green Workplaces Project ran a session entitled 'Save Energy, Save Money'. Mr Osborne said that, "despite the current economic crisis we must not forget the problem of climate change and this session shows that individuals and businesses can

cut costs while becoming more environmentally friendly." This month the TUC are holding a seminar advising union representatives how to help the climate and the future of businesses by reducing the cost of travel. Yeovil TUC have taken this issue to heart and called for union members to get involved with South West TUC's Green Workplaces Project.

Mr Osborne said that "the economic downturn is placing a great deal of pressure on businesses but we must not forget the threat posed by climate change, The TUC campaign shows that Greening the workplace makes sound financial senses. Environmental legislation and the pressure to reduce carbon emissions will start to change the UK economy over the coming decade, it could also help businesses weather the recession."

Mr Osborne said that, "working people must be intimately involved with their employers to ensure a 'just transition' to a low carbon economy. Trade unions must be in the forefront of this transition; climate change is a problem that can only be solved by both individual and collective action."

At the recent 'Skills for the Future' conference the TUC Regional Secretary, Nigel Costley repeated his call for "a range of skill development opportunities including those in sustainable construction, insulation, energy conservation, engineering skills in renewable energy and micro-generation, smart energy metering, energy advice, recycling, bio-fuels and public transport."

The Green Workplaces team have already visited a number of union reps in the area to discuss the issues and are keen to speak to as many people as possible about the importance of this initiative. To further this initiative Frances Robertson will be address Yeovil TUC on April 15th and union members are welcome to attend.

Dave Osborne can be contacted c/o Yeovil TUC, Unity Hall, Yeovil, BA20 1JL. The TUC Green Workplaces project team can be contacted on 0117 947 0521.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Trades Union Councils act as the local body of the TUC and bring together delegates from individual unions to:

- Raise public awareness about rights at work and the role of unions in enforcing those rights.
- Promote drives to build union membership
- Support union and community campaigns to for dignity and respect in the workplace and beyond
- Keep union members up to date with developments in the wider union movement.

Yeovil TUC meets at Unity Hall at 7.30 p.m. on the third Wednesday of every month.

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8. Correspondence: None

9. Any other business: None.

President _____