

YEovil & DISTRICT TRADES UNION COUNCIL



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Minutes of the **Meeting** held Wednesday 21st October 2009 at Unity Hall Yeovil BA20 1JL

Present: Mark Hoskins, PCS; Vivian Willis, Unite/Amicus; Brian Macrae, Unite/Amicus; Rex Brown, Unite/Amicus; Bill Byrd, Unite/Amicus; Dave Osborne, Unite/Amicus; David Kingdon, Unite/Amicus; Joe Conway, Unite/TGWU; Dave Symington, Unite/TGWU; Peter Joyce, Unison and Ken Keable, visitor (Prospect).

- 1. Apologies:** Neal Ware, Unite/TGWU and Brian Wadsworth, Unite/Amicus.
- 2. Minutes:** after the following correction in item 8, AOB, delete "lunch" insert "launch", the minutes are accepted as a correct and true record.
- 3. Matters arising:** our press release from the last meeting was published ref. Conservative, Somerset County Council cuts.
- 4. Officers reports:** the **President** reported on the TUC Annual Conference at Liverpool; the big unions have come out in support of the People's Charter, but joint Unite GS Derek Simpson was not very enthusiastic; a big debate on Israel/Palestine, which included a motion supporting a boycott of selected Israeli goods; a lively debate between Derek Simpson and RMT GS Bob Crow about the Labour Party; debate on the anti-union laws, that they are still in place after over 12 years of a Labour Government; a call for support for the CWU on the issues affecting Royal Mail workers; Redundancies at GKN Structures, 135 from a workforce of 317 on site.

The **Secretary** reported that he had been in contact with Colin Rolfe, about setting up of a Trades Union Council for Chard. Upshot being that Colin would organise a time, date and venue; contact was made with Tony Watts of Yeovil Royal Mail CWU rep, a picket is to take place from 5am until 10am Friday 23rd October 2009. We took part in a Jobs, Peace and Education demonstration outside the Labour Party Conference Brighton was passive with about 2000 taking part, but policing was heavy.

Received from Dave Chapple, SW TUC Working Party for Trades Councils, that on Tuesday 20th October was the inaugural meeting of West Wiltshire Trades Union Council, at Trowbridge Civic Hall, Dave asked for delegates from other TUC's to be present, but a message of support was sent from us, "On behalf of Yeovil TUC, we extend our support and solidarity to West Wiltshire TUC, and wish it every success in every endeavour". The Secretary had been in contact with Nick Quirck of RMT to give a talk on the People's Charter at the November meeting, noting that this will be held on a Thursday- 19th November, Joe to book the room.

The **Treasurer** reported that the current account balance stands at £899:06 in credit. That he had received from the National Shop Stewards Network a financial appeal, the meeting agreed £20. Also received from Defend Council Housing affiliation, we nominated Bill Byrd to take out individual membership and reports to us on their activities, £25; Received from 3224M branch £15 affiliation.

SWTUC Delegates report: see attached.

People's Charter Convention Camden Centre, Kings Cross, Bidborough Street, Saturday 21st November 2009 – Viv Willis to be delegate.

5. Local matters: It was noted that Terry Morgan and Roger Anderson from USDAW who attended the August meeting have not been since, it was requested that the secretary makes contact.

It is suggested that next year's May Day event focuses on green/environmental and youth unemployment issues that contact be made with Keith Hatch from SWTUC green officer and music promoter; this to be put on the agenda for the next meeting.

PCS consultation at HMRC, changes to the Civil Service compensation scheme will conclude at the end of the month.

6. Press release: none.

7. Correspondence: From Cuba Solidarity Campaign, Christmas cards at £40 per 100, we get 100 cards.

8. Any other business: Saturday 24th October Black History music night at Bridgwater, hosted by Dave Chapple of Bridgwater TUC.

National Stop the War Coalition demonstration, Central London, march from speaker's corner to Trafalgar Square.

President _____

TUC Regional Council, 3rd October 2009

Issues from previous minutes

The TUC support the **Future Jobs Fund initiative** but it must result in proper jobs and wages. There is a union representative on the panel appraising bids and union involvement could provide a recruiting opportunity.

There was an update on the **postal dispute**. THE CWU are painted as greedy but Royal Mail made over £300 million profit and paid bonuses to managers; they then want a pay freeze for workers. Royal Mail took a 13 year 'pensions holiday' and now threaten to close the pension scheme. Royal Mail is not modernising but preparing for privatisation. Bullying is rampant and staff are forced to work 11 hour days for 8 hours pay. Managers, Unite members, are being used to do postmen's jobs and this is causing widespread anger.

West Wilts TUC expect to launch on 20th October with members from FBU, CWU, Unison and GMB (migrant workers group). Labour has no councillors in the area and no parliamentary candidate. Concern was raised about the **TUC Pensioners** Committee / conference, it has no national standing and want more action from the TUC on pensioner's issues. The FBU report light at the end of the tunnel in their campaign against **regional control centres**.

Speakers

Nigel Costley gave a brief summary of the economic position in the South West. The speakers from Columbia Solidarity held a separate meeting after Regional Council and this is dealt with under that report.

Simon Nunn from the National Housing Federation, said his group is a broad coalition in support of affordable housing. The group supports the work of housing associations in providing better housing and recognises the need for more tenant involvement. Simon told the meeting that:

- The South West is the only region where house prices are higher than average but wages are lower than average.
- We have the highest proportion of second homes in the country
- House prices have risen 171% in ten years
- One in fourteen households are on a waiting list.

The challenges in providing more affordable housing are:

- Grants being forced down because of the economic crisis
- Combating NIMBYism (especially among second home owners)
- Political uncertainty.

Justice for Colombia South West – 3rd October 2009

Maviela Kohon (Justice for Colombia) and **Aidee Moreno** (Head of Human Rights at FENSUAGRO, the farm workers' union in Colombia) addressed the TUC Regional Council and then later addressed a meeting of those interested in supporting JfC in our region. Maviela explained that the JfC in London is run by two people and they need whatever help they can get.

With Maviella as her interpreter, Aidee told us that FENSUAGRO members are spread across the whole of Columbia, including disputed territories. The government accuse them of being terrorist or terrorist collaborators; their land is frequently confiscated, their members are then displaced and forced to survive on the streets of the cities.

Union reps are often murdered or disappeared. Murders of trade unionists were up by 25% last year on the year before. Aidee told us that her mother, brother and husband were all been murdered and her niece is among thousands who have disappeared. Thanks to the interest of the outside world Aidee goes everywhere with an armed bodyguard but she has been threatened with arrest. Union members are often arrested on trumped up charges and are left in prison indefinitely while the State tries to trump up evidence against them. 150

FENSUAGRO are currently in prison, they are denied medical attention and basic amenities such as toilet rolls, toothpaste and sanitary towels for the women. Children under three are allowed to stay with their mothers but no provisions are made for these infants. Children over three are taken away and not allowed to see their mothers.

Aidee was asked what gives her the courage to carry on and she said she has no choice but to fight for the future of her children. FENSUAGRO members have the courage to change the country even if the government does not. The support of the JfC and the international union movement has helped win freedom for many of her people, it has helped provide bodyguards for union representatives and shine the light of publicity on government actions. The government say they are clamping down on the murders but have yet to show evidence of any arrests.

Maviella explained that many governments in “the West” have provided military aid to the Colombian government. The government is currently trying to negotiate a free trade agreement with the West, this has been blocked in the USA, Canada and the EFTA countries in Europe, but negotiations with the EU continue.

The UK government provides military aid to Columbia, which it says is for training and intelligence in counter narcotic activities. However, the Columbian government does not differentiate between counter narcotics and counter insurgency. The UK government will not say what units they support and is accused of supporting paramilitaries carrying out attacks on trade unionists.

Those present asked if we should campaign for a boycott of certain goods in support of Colombian trade unions.

Aidee said that her people see no value in campaigns against individual companies. They need whatever support we can give to provide things like projectors for use in training, toiletries for members in prison. At present FENSUAGRO can only afford to send toiletries to prisoners two or three times a year but would like any help we can give to increase the frequency of such aid packages.

NB: For more information on JfC South West contact brucerobin@thompsons.law.co.uk.