

# Yeovil & District TUC Newsletter

A campaigning publication for local Trade Unionists: issue #1 - June 2006



## Yeovil TUC

**Welcome** to this the first edition of Yeovil & District TUC newsletter. The aims of it are to inform organise and educate local Trades Unionists on local, National, European and global issues affecting us, as a local campaigning strategy. What is Yeovil TUC? We are the local equivalent of the British TUC, where branches of TUC affiliated Trades Unions affiliate, with delegates according to how many members the delegate's branch has. We meet every third Wednesday @ Unity Hall, Central Road, Yeovil (Opposite the Bus station) The above Trades Unions are affiliated to us, members of affiliated organisations are welcome to come to the meetings..

This year the TUC has issued the following aims & objectives for local Trades Union Councils:

- \* Raise public awareness of rights at work and the Union role in enforcing those rights.
- \* Promote organising and recruitment drives to build up Union membership.
- \* Promote equality in all their activities.
- \* Follow the programme of work agreed by the Conference and TUCJCC.
- \* Support union & community campaigns for dignity & respect in the workplace & beyond.
- \* Promote the interests of all of its affiliate organisations and to secure united action on all questions affecting or likely to affect those interests.
- \* Improve generally the economic and social conditions of working people in the local area.

Campaign in support of local or regional industrial action officially authorised by the union or unions concerned.

## Local News

### Chard Hygrade factory closure – demo 11<sup>th</sup> March

Tony Dowling – GMB full time officer is supporting the Hygrade workers in the campaign for a better redundancy package and is pictured below, from left to right with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall (River Cottage TV series, who was conducting research for a forthcoming TV programme) Colin Rolfe - branch secretary, Keith Milton - branch president, at the back are Joe Conway TGWU Convenor @ Augusta Westland helicopters and Stuart Fagan - senior officer, Plymouth office. Joe Conway and Bill Byrd kindly joined us from Yeovil along with their Trades Union Council banner behind which we had a short march to Tesco



Apparently Hygrade supply Supermarket Chain Tesco. This will see the loss of 300 plus jobs in Chard.

The GMB organised a march though Chard on Friday March 31<sup>st</sup> as part of an ongoing campaign to get an improved redundancy settlement, the workers at the Hygrade factory are being offered the statutory minimum redundancy pay. The Hygrade factory is part of the Tulip TNC . Hygrade supplies a Major supermarket, reports suggest the factory is profitable but it is to be re-located to Birmingham.

## **Local news – continued**

### **Hygrade Demo 17<sup>th</sup> MARCH**



Pictured above, Glyn Ford MEP Labour South West with Stewards and members

of Hygrade Chard workforce.

The follow on march from last Friday 11<sup>th</sup> March got underway by 6.40 pm after a blessing from the Reverend Tricker one of our local Ministers and 130 strong in number.

Prior to this both BBC Spotlight West and HTV West Country completed live broadcasts showing the forming of the march with interviews and comment. Earlier in the day families of the workforce were interviewed by HTV West Country to give the personal side of how a factory closure affects families within its community. Local Radio were also giving bulletins throughout the day. Our local paper the Chard & Ilminster were also present with Alex Cameron, Chief Reporter who was with us for several hours covering the whole event.

We are grateful to our local Sergeant Andrew Lloyd who with his small team made the logistical side of the march safe and their support was much appreciated.

As we marched through to the town Guildhall, people came out from their houses and also gave their support. We were met at the Guildhall by John Malcolm Mayor of Chard, David Bulmer Deputy Mayor plus other Councillors all of which the works representatives are much appreciative of their support. The Guildhall event comprised of speeches of support from Glyn Ford MEP, Rosie Boycott a former Editor of the Independent, David Bulmer, Kathy Morrison and Tony Dowling, Full Time GMB Officer. The meeting was very well attended with some 160 people present; Yeovil TUC was present with Banner. To finish off the evening, Russ Middleton from Reddirt gave us a selection of Political song forms his latest album 'Go Go USA'. [www.reddirt.co.uk](http://www.reddirt.co.uk).

## **Yeovil Hospital**

Good news for the National Health over the past few years. Waiting times are down, if your wanting an operation. If you are an employee waiting for back pay, tough! You are promised it by June 06. six month wait! Lets hope your mortgage can wait and the rest of your bills can to. So much for the Partnership we hear about. The staff has more than delivered. What about the Yeovil hospital management, when are they going to!

### **Parking at the Hospital**

Thinking of visiting some one at Yeovil Hospital Be prepared to pay for parking. What about the patients, carers and visitors who have to go on a regular basis; any concessions for them? Can you get clamped? What about people who work there? Do they have to pay?

## **Amicus, TGWU, GMB mergers:**

Early in 2005, an initiative – led by Amicus for a merger between it, and the TGWU and GMB. In issue 8 Winter 2005 edition of Amicus's publication "The magazine", General Secretary Derek Simpson presented a vision for organised labour as to how a merged union would face the new challenges of globalisation, neo-liberalism and the TNC's (Trans-national corporations e.g. Augusta/Westland, parent company Finmeccanica of Italy) – how does organised labour resist and oppose the "race to the bottom" on jobs, wages, pensions, benefits etc? Business seeks out the cheapest sources of labour. A favourable argument being it could prevent TNC's from pitting workers from one country against those in another.

### **"We are working towards the completion of the merger by 2007 – this is just the beginning"**

What's happening with the merger? It appears, to date that the TGWU is ahead in producing its consultation - discussion document "Towards the new union – first stage of consultation with members begins" with responses to be in by Friday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2006. Will the new union be democratic, or will it be perceived as being remote with further alienation of the membership? Will it be an effective campaigning union which involves the widest possible membership participation? Will it develop the necessary strategies to educate and organise workers to take on new challenges with confidence; and eliminate or reduce divisions that only weaken us?

The most important question, what rule book will eventually immerge? It is essential that a democratic rule book ensures democratic control and accountability. Previous experience shows increased centralised control and removal of democracy and

## ***TU Mergers continued***

closure of branches e.g. EETPU –AEU and eventually, AEEU and MSF that it has taken a very long time to restore recognisable elements of democracy and accountability – are far cry from the AEU rule book.

There should be the fullest possible participation through existing democratic structures with a delegate conference to vote on any proposals. The TGWU appears to have a recall conference and the GMB similarly intend to give delegates the opportunity to vote on any proposals before any ballot of members.

There could be advantages in the way of more efficient use of financial, intellectual and material resources, like at present regional offices replicating what one another do, and could reduce inter-union squabbles

However, the necessary prerequisite is the fundamental freedom to take effective collective action for Trade Unions irrespective of size.

## **Trade Union Freedom Bill, National demonstration May1st 2006:**

It is 100 years ago in 1906 that the Trades Dispute act came into fruition, in the wake of the Taff Vale Railway dispute. The act gave trade Unions greater confidence to organise and fight. Today, a hundred years on, we have far less freedom. Of the industrialised Countries; probably Britain has the most repressive and restrictive anti- union laws. Therefore the TUC organised a national demonstration on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 in Central London. This is the beginning of an ongoing campaign for the Trade Union Freedom bill to be presented to Parliament for December. To date, early day motion 1170 has secured the signatures of 119 MP's. Well what is in the Bill?

- \* Protection for strikers.
  - \* Simplification of ballots.
  - \* Simplification of notice procedures.
  - \* Restricted use of injunctions.
  - \* Extended definition of trade disputes and solidarity action.
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- \* No use of replacement labour during strikes.

## **May Day demonstration in London**

Thousands of trades unionists from all over Britain gathered in Clearkenwell Green to march on Trafalgar Square including a delegation from Yeovil and Chard, demanding the implementation of the Bill. The march entered Trafalgar Square with

Bob Crow RMT and Tony Benn. When it is hoped the Bill will receive its first hearing in the House of Commons at the end of the year and further demonstrations in support.

## ***What's happening in France***

The French Government are trying to bring in to fruition the CPE( Contrat première embauche) – the first job contract - for workers under 26. It allows bosses to fire them without reason or prior notice for the first two years in a job; jobs with no security.

The majority reject the CPEs reflects the rejection of policies of creating jobs without any job security and a positive step towards seeking an alternative to neo-liberalism, French Trade Unionists can see the future and consequences the other side of the English Channel if this goes ahead.

More than two-thirds of the French population are now against the CPEs -far more than the "the excluded" and "the youth"; the polls already showed in May 2005 that the neo-liberalism that was to be enshrined in the European Constitution was rejected massively not just by "the populace" (workers and employees) but also by an increasing segment of intellectuals and of managers - far more so than the Maastricht treaty. Yet today, the real reason for this wide-spread mobilization against the CPEs is the rejection of the whole concept of eliminating job security and consequently of making people's whole lives insecure, from the unskilled to management-level employees.

The sentiment of legitimacy, of democracy, of social progress is now on the side of the anti-CPE", Maryse Dumas of the CGT said with assurance

The MEDEF the French employer's organisation is pushing for this for all workers.



## Bolkestein Directive Kill it!

The Deputy Prime Minister, Liberal Party leader and, most recently, EU Commissioner Frits Bolkestein's "services directive" as being Thatcher in a bad mood". His party, the VVD, has played a major role in the last decade's massive assault on the Netherlands' once enviable welfare state. Now, as his swansong, outgoing Commissioner Bolkestein has brought forward a proposal which can, without hyperbole, be described as a declaration of war on working men and women and the social, health care and educational provisions which are the fruits of two centuries of struggle. Welcome to the European Commission's proposal 2004/002, the Directive on Services in the Internal Market, the Directive that came from hell, widely known simply as the Bolkestein Directive. The Treaty establishing the European Union guarantees that there will be free movement of services between member states. If a French company wants to sell a service in the UK, for example, it must be allowed to. We may have our doubts about the desirability of such a *carte blanche* right, but that debate is for another day. The point here is that the proposed Directive is more than a hammer to crack a nut. It treats the nut as if it was a WMD, and sends the legalistic equivalent of stealth bombers to hammer those responsible for it into submission

The most disturbing aspect of the proposal is the so-called "Country of Origin principle". Simply put, this states that a service-provider must follow the rules and laws not of the country in which the service is to be provided, but the one in which it is "established".

"Establishment", moreover, should not be taken to mean that a firm has any real roots in a particular part of the world. A US multinational, for example, can establish itself in, say, Lithuania, simply by registering its presence there. It can then trade in the UK whilst conforming only to Lithuanian law on such matters as health and safety, employees' rights, or environmental protection. Worse still, because the British authorities would have no rights in the matter, Lithuania is expected to send inspectors to ensure that the service provider conforms to its laws.

The Country of Origin Principle is merely the most dangerous and offensive aspect of a proposal which is in every aspect unacceptable. Covering everything except transport, financial services, certain services

provided free of charge by the state, and those already covered by other Directives, the Directive forbids members to refuse permission to trade to any operator authorised to do so in any other member state. It also effectively makes the application of any kind of regional development plan illegal. Finally, it obliges national authorities to cover costs incurred by anyone who goes to another member state for medical treatment which would be paid for had they undergone it at home - and forbids them from requiring 'prior consent'.

The good news is that the proposal has a long way to go before it becomes law, and there are signs of disquiet extending well beyond the Labour or environmental movements.

Nevertheless, we cannot rely on Euro-MPs and government ministers to throw this proposal into the dustbin. The last major attack on working people to come from Brussels, the Port Services Directive, was defeated by co-ordinated activities inside and outside parliaments, including mass demonstrations which brought tens of thousands of dockworkers and their supporters to Rotterdam, Brussels and Strasbourg - Pan European action. At the same time, some intelligent work from left parliamentarians assembled a coalition of the unwilling which was eventually able to have the entire proposal chucked out. We need urgently to organise our parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forces again in the face of this even greater threat. And with the legislative process well under way, we need to do it now.

The Bolkestein Directive has now been modified and is acceptable to some who originally opposed it; to others the modifications seem so vague the directive is still potentially unchanged.

Employer's legal experts are poring over the latest text for loop holes to be exploited.

We in the trade unions must be on our guard.

This newsletter was published and printed by the Yeovil & District TUC Unity Hall Central Road Yeovil.

Edited by B.Byrd & V.Willis [vivianvjw@aol.com](mailto:vivianvjw@aol.com)