

Newsletter:
May Day
special
2009
Volume 1
Issue 10

Yeovil & District Trades Union Council

www.yeoviltuc.org.uk

A campaigning publication for local trade unionists: *Got a boss? Get a union!*



May Day Celebration - Hope not hate Their crisis – our challenge

Inside:

Page 2:

Around the Town & District:

Campaigning For Pensioners in Yeovil.

Ham Hill song

Page 3:

Corporate Tax Evasion.

Polyclinics may not benefit patients

Page 4:

Unite press Release: Unite Statement On the former General Secretary of The TGWU Jack Jones

May Day originated in Chicago in the 1880s with the campaign to limit the working day to eight hours, but it has come to be the day when all the most important themes of our great international movement are given an airing – especially solidarity. Solidarity is the essence of trade unionism, and this must include solidarity between workers of all nationalities and all races. Racism is a dagger aimed at the heart of trade unionism. We must fight it or it will defeat us.

With the worsening recession – which was not caused by workers, of any race or nationality - some people will respond by turning on foreign workers or those from the black and minority ethnic communities. The racist BNP are standing candidates in the local and EU elections on 4th June and there is a danger that people will fall for their message of hate, fear and division. They also hope to exploit a very low turnout.

Racism was invented by British and other ruling classes in order to divide those whom they ruled. It enabled them to fool white British people into helping them to enslave African people and, later, to rule the British Empire. If British people had not accepted racist ideas there could have been no slave trade, no slave plantations and no colonies. That is why racism is so deeply embedded in British history and culture. Islamophobia is one of the forms that it currently takes.

Yeovil TUC's May Day celebration is on Friday 1st May, 7.30pm at the Labour Club, Central Rd, BA20 1JL, opposite the bus station. The theme is "Hope Not Hate". It is opposing racism and xenophobia. There is live band "Seize the Day" and vintage reggae and ska from Bridgwater's Red Shadow sound system; we hope to have a short film about the history of Rock Against Racism, and some speakers. (Some details are yet to be finalised). Admission is £5 (£3 for concessions). Tickets are available from Acorn Records or on the night, or from 01935 476642.

Website:
www.hopenothate.org.uk/southwest/

The "Put People First" G20 demonstration in London was attended locally, transport having been organised by a young non-aligned activist Tim Harris, who filled a 50 seater coach, and had his comments from the demonstration broadcast on local radio stations. The demonstration was attended by about 35,000 people, comprising trade unionists from Europe and around the world, anti-war groups, faith organisations, charities, NGOs and anti-poverty groups, to persuade the G20 leaders to at least recognise their concerns.

Supporting the bankers, not the victims, was a key priority of the G20 leaders.

Trade unions have always been mass organisations for human progress, and tribunes of the least well off.

Now, more than ever, trade unions are organising on social issues, campaigning for the end of poverty, challenging war and neo-liberalism (aka Thatcherism), and proclaiming workers' rights as basic human rights.

We can end exploitation and oppression. The System doesn't have to operate the way it is now, with the rich getting outrageously richer while the vast majority of humanity sink into greater and deeper poverty and debt. £1.3 trillion of tax payers' money has gone to bail out the banks, with almost nothing for helping ordinary working people keep their jobs and homes, for building council houses, for pensions and care for the elderly, ending child poverty, keeping rural Post Offices open and properly funded public works.

The last Conservative and present New Labour Government have stopped boasting over the so-called success of the "light regulatory touch" compounded with the most repressive anti-union legislation in Europe. The market fundamentalists and the bankers are to blame. Their crisis - our challenge. This recession can't be blamed on trade unions.

Seen on a placard on the G20 demonstration
"If you aren't angry, you're not paying attention"

Around the Town & District

Campaigning for pensioners in Yeovil

The Yeovil Fifty-Plus Forum, a new organisation formed in November, is going all-out to get a big attendance at its public meeting on 14th May.

Members who travelled to a meeting in Bristol on 22nd November, in the coach provided free by Yeovil Trade Union Council, were impressed by one of the speakers there, Neil Duncan-Jordan, who is National Officer of the National Pensioners Convention. He will be the speaker on 14th May. His theme: Campaigning for Pensioners. He will make the case for a higher state pension, free social care, free nation-wide travel, keeping our local post offices and dignity in retirement.

The National Pensioners Convention, which is supported by the trade union movement, is Britain's biggest pensioner organisation, representing over 1000 local, regional and national pensioner groups with a total of 1.5 million members. Its Honorary Life President was the late veteran trade union leader Jack Jones. See www.npcuk.org.

About one sixth of the UK's population - some 11 million people - are pensioners. Yet the basic state pension is just 15% of the average wage, down from 25% when pensions were first paid in 1909.

The meeting starts at 2.30pm at the South Street Centre, Union St/South St, Yeovil (opposite the Town Council offices). Admission is free and there will be a collection. As the publicity says, all are welcome – present and future pensioners.

- The case for a higher state pension
- For free social care
- For free nation-wide travel
- For keeping our local Post Offices
- For Dignity in Retirement

The Yeovil 50+ Forum meets on the 2nd Thursday of every month at 2.30pm at the South Street Centre. Its Secretary is Dorothy Bennett, phone (01935) 414715.

Ham Hill song

During the 1870s and 1880s mass rallies were held on top of Ham Hill to demand better pay and conditions, housing, votes and education for the agricultural labourers and their families. Here is one of the songs they sang.

Come all you bold fellows that follow the plough
Hedging, or ditching, or milking the cow.
The time has arrived, and the union flag waves
We won't be kept down like a lot of white slaves.

Chorus:

So be ready, boys, ready, for the union be steady,
The white slaves of England will soon gain the day.

From Langport and Martock we'll meet at Stoke Cross,
For the fat-bellied farmers we don't care a toss,
From Odcombe and Preston and Montacute too,
We'll come with flags flying and ribbons of blue.

You may now tell the farmers you'll be slave no more,
The starvation wages youm will not endure.
Though you work night and day, you could not satisfy,
They treated you worse than a pig in a sty.

The farmers will very soon find I am sure
That a man is a man if he's ever so poor,
And no better men can in England be found,
Than the hard-working man who is tilling the ground.

All England will learn of your doings today,
As in grand procession we all march away,
And down-trodden labourers will cry as they march,
May God bless our hero the brave Joseph Arch.

The above is taken from *One from the Plough* by Brendon Owen (on sale in Montacute Post Office). It tells the story of George Mitchell, an agricultural labourer from Montacute who became rich in London after becoming a stone-mason. He returned to Somerset to build the National Agricultural Labourers' Union (founded by Joseph Arch) holding huge rallies in Yeovil, Montacute, Ham Hill and elsewhere. He called himself "One from the plough".

In 2007 Yeovil TUC helped fund a permanent memorial to George Mitchell in the Rangers' Hut on Ham Hill.

Corporate tax evasion

WORKERS are handing over a larger share of their wages in tax than fat-cat corporations are paying on their multibillion-pound profits, a new investigation revealed in February.

Tax avoidance by hundreds of major companies is causing a massive £13 billion shortfall in public funds - enough to build more than 300 hospitals - which has to be made up by the rest of us.

Prompted by a newspaper exposé, HM Revenue and Customs admitted that the government should be receiving more than £53 billion in corporation tax, but, thanks to company executives cooking the books, only £40 billion was actually paid last year.

TUC tax expert Richard Murphy pointed out "this means that 2.4 million workers are paying tax simply to fill the gap in public funds left by executives avoiding their obligations."

The investigation discovered that some companies were paying as little as 2 per cent tax, despite raking in billions of pounds in profits.

The investigation found that other companies were deliberately loading the books with debt so that there are no profits to pay tax on, while still more were transferring brand names to subsidiaries based in notorious tax havens.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber warned that such scams "threatened the future of public services".

"Paying tax looks increasingly optional for big companies and the super-rich, who increasingly float free from the network of mutual obligations that underpin any civilised society," he said.

Hall of Shame

The average worker pays 30% of their wages in tax and national insurance.

But in 2007:

Barclays Bank paid just 22% on £7 billion profits;
British Airways paid 7% on £880 million;
Marks and Spencer paid 17% on £937 million;
Halifax Bank of Scotland paid 16% on £5.4 billion;
HSBC paid 22% on £45 billion;
Diageo drinks company paid just 2% on £2 billion.

There are 11 tax havens currently under direct British control - Alderney, Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Gibraltar, Guernsey, the Isle of Man, Jersey, Sark and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Polyclinics may not benefit patients

A group of MPs has criticised the government's controversial proposals to establish a network of polyclinics across the country.

Polyclinics or GP-led health centres are designed to bring together a range of services such as diagnostic testing, minor surgery, blood tests and X-rays.

The House of Commons Health Select Committee is unconvinced by the argument that every Primary Care Trust should have its own GP-led health centre or polyclinic. It warned that there was not enough evidence to say all areas required them and criticised the government's drive to introduce polyclinics "without prior pilots and adequate evaluation".

Research by Pulse, the newspaper for GPs, shows that private companies will run one in four of the NHS polyclinics. It says that, of the 54 contracts announced so far, 14 have been won by private companies or groups led by the independent sector. It warns that this development could lead to a significant expansion of the use of the private sector in the NHS. Polyclinic for Yeovil?

www.unison.org.uk/positivelypublic

UNITE PRESS RELEASE

Unite Statement on Jack Jones 22nd April 2009

It is with the greatest sadness that I must advise you that Jack Jones, former general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, died late yesterday.

We have lost the greatest trade unionist of the entire post-war era, a man whose name will be forever associated with the finest achievements and highest values of our movement. Indeed, the entire history of trade unionism in Britain yields few comparable figures.

Our first condolences are of course extended to Jack's family, above all his sons Jack and Michael. We share their sorrow and also their pride in the life of their remarkable father.

Jack Jones led the T&G to become the strongest working-class organisation our country has ever seen, more than two million men and women united to secure a better life both at work and in the wider society.

Continued on page 4...

(cont.) When he was our general secretary, no great question of industrial policy or economic management could be addressed without the T&G's input. Nor did the smallest detail of union organisation or industrial negotiation in any of the industries in which our union represented working people escape his attention. In all this work he was guided by a profound concern to improve the lot of the ordinary people of this country whose only strength, he understood, lay in collective organisation. From his earliest days as a T&G organiser in Coventry, he placed the organisation of the union in the factories at the heart of his work, developing and promoting the shop stewards movement.

Jack's greatness as a leader rested above all on his belief in the instincts and outlook of the membership. He was always a partisan of lay democracy, of the union being run by the men and women who joined it, and with authority being devolved to the districts and the workplaces. Building on the achievements of Frank Cousins, he entrenched progressive values and democratic tolerance at the heart of the T&G. At the same time he led from the front, animating the whole of our union with his broad conception of the role of trade unionism. While a master of industrial detail, he never lost sight of the wider socialist perspective which had motivated him from his earliest days working on the Liverpool docks. This informed his commitment to full equality for working women, his opposition to all forms of racism and injustice, and his unflinching support for workers fighting oppression in all lands.

He was loyal to the Labour Party, knowing that only a Labour government could both protect working people from the worst ravages of capitalism and also work towards that brighter future. He always fought his corner within the Party and always urged it, sometimes most vocally, to remain true to its roots. Jack will also be forever linked with the struggle for democracy and against fascism.

As a young man he put his life on the line to go to Spain to fight in support of the elected government of the Republic against the fascist insurrection, and was wounded in that struggle. The people of Spain and all internationalists across the world have lost a comrade. Older workers in Britain also have cause to give particular thanks for Jack's campaigning zeal, since he devoted most of his post-retirement years to championing the case for justice for pensioners and in particular to see the state pension secured at a decent level. Not for Jack a life of cosy retirement. Every breath he gave to the struggle.

Jack strongly supported the formation of Unite, the merger of the T&G and Amicus, as being the best way to carry forward in new circumstances the values of

the union he had built. Disappointed, of course, at

the setbacks of the last generation, he never lost his optimism and was delighted to see our union recover its organising and fighting back spirit.

For thousands of us still active in the movement, Jack was a friend and a mentor, always ready to offer wise counsel when it was sought, right down to the last months of his life. Always sharp in his understanding of our problems, modest in his lifestyle, uninterested in any honour beyond serving the movement, he embodied everything a trade unionist should be. Dockers and car workers, bus drivers and engineering workers, white-collar employees and farmworkers, those driving a lorry or working in an aircraft cabin – we are all today bereft.

For millions of working people, the comforts we enjoy, such security as we have established and the social gains we have secured, all of these stand on the shoulders of the organisation that Jack Jones developed and of the leadership he gave. As he took forward the work of Bevin and Cousins, so shall we carry forward the legacy of Jack Jones into the future, the unbroken tradition of working-class solidarity and struggle.

Today, with profound emotion, Unite dips its banner in memory of the greatest amongst us. Tomorrow, as Jack Jones would have wished, we shall put our shoulders to the wheel once more, working as he did for justice for workers, for internationalism, peace and socialism.

Tony Woodley
Joint General
Secretary, Unite
General
Secretary – T&G
section



Yeovil TUC meets every third Wednesday of the month @ the address below. All union members welcome (though only delegates may vote). Meetings start @ 19:30hrs. Is your branch affiliated? Contact us for an application form.

Want copies of this newsletter? What's going on in your workplace? Do have any comments? Please contact us:

Printed & Published by Yeovil TUC yeoviltuc.org.uk
Unity Hall, Central Road, Yeovil Somerset BA20 1JL

Editing & Design by Bill Byrd, Ken Keable and Vivian Willis
07855 320041 vivianvw@aol.com