



**Special
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Authority
for
Somerset**

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- **4000 Job cuts.**

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Unitary Authority for Somerset

The Liberal Democrat controlled Somerset County Council are proposing the abolition of all of Somerset District Councils; South Somerset, North Somerset, Mendip, Sedgemoor, Bath and North East Somerset. The idea is to create a single authority, this in itself suggests the rolling back of democracy and accountability that a Council has, or in this case, goes ahead, did have.

It appears that they have rung up a massive £30 million deficit. This will most likely mean massive job cuts, workers who deliver front line public services for those most in need.

This will be achieved without any public debate and/or protest. But if sufficient numbers of our members with the wider public are organised into an effective, cogent and substantive campaign, this can be challenged and overturned. A demonstration and mass lobby was held in Taunton at the full County Council meeting in January 2007, in order to to initiate a full and public debate, protect jobs and services.

Union fury at Council's job threat letters

17/01/07. Trade union representatives have slammed Bath and North East Somerset Council for sending out letters threatening nearly 6,000 staff with dismissal. For several months union officials and senior council officers have been trying to agree on how the massive "single status" pay review should be implemented. Lisa Youlton, Unison's south west regional officer, said: "The council have had nine years to plan and pay for this process, and having failed to do **so expect our lowest-paid workers to take a cut in pay** while higher-paid workers benefit from increases."

Legal fees of £350,000 in Coventry Single Status dispute

17/01/07. The single status pay dispute cost Coventry taxpayers £350,000 in legal fees alone last year, it has emerged. Coventry Council imposed the new wage and grading structure despite widespread workforce opposition. An avalanche of more than 540 equal pay claims against the council have been lodged by staff with the first to be heard in September. The bill for the last 12 months **includes specialised advice from solicitors Eversheds in Birmingham** and barristers, including a QC. This must beg the question, who thinks they won by imposing this deal on the workforce?

Crisis of representation?

Political parties are so small they are "nearing critical condition" in many constituencies, a survey suggests. The Unlock Democracy group found 40% of Liberal Democrat associations **had fewer than 100 members, followed by 20% of Tory and 3% of Labour associations.**

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Branch S33 of the GMB launches it's second round of basic IT courses **free** to its members as part of 'The Community Learning Project'

Non members also welcome at a £15 course fee.

For more details Contact Michelle Gordon (union project worker on) 07866 369259

Exploited agency workers?

The workers who clean the streets and collect the rubbish in Salford live in two parallel worlds. First, there are the 144 who are directly employed by the city council. They receive a decent wage, get sick pay, and have job security.

Then, according to December figures, there are the 103 on agency books. This group earns £2-£2.50 an hour less than their directly employed counterparts - and for the same work. Some are asked to turn up between five and six in the morning to find out whether they have work for the day, like dockers in the 1930s.

Minimum wage to increase by 17p

The minimum wage will increase by 17p an hour to £5.52, the government announced today.

The rate will come into force in October and will mean an increase in pay for more than one million workers, of which two-thirds are low-paid women.

Separate rates for young employees will continue, but hourly pay for 18- to 21-year-olds will rise 15p to £4.60, while 16 and 17-year-olds will receive 10p more per hour at £3.40.

Minimum wage fails to close pay gap.

Poor see their earnings rise by more than prices but the rich still get richer faster. The average salary for directors rose by 28% last year - a nice little earner when inflation is rising by only 3%. Employers' organisers bemoaned the fact that the NMW would involve still more red tape. In fact a study found that there was a far greater chance of a company being inspected for poverty pay when the old wages councils were in existence in 1988 than there is today. A firm [can expect a visit from Revenue](#)

[and Customs once every 330 years](#) on average and to be found breaking the law once a millennium.

Angry NHS unions suspect Brown's hand in 1.5% off

20/10/06. Nurses' leaders accused the government last night of imposing "a massive pay cut" on all NHS staff when it emerged that ministers want to peg next year's pay rise to 1.5%. [Unions believe that the chancellor](#), Gordon Brown, intervened [to reduce the offer that the health secretary, Patricia Hewitt](#), thought hospitals should be able to afford

Labour snubs agency workers and the unions

The Labour government showed yesterday the gulf between its own agenda and that of even the most moderate unions when a minister crushed a new law to provide employment protection for millions of temporary and migrant workers.

Many agency workers face discrimination in the workplace and poorer pay, denial of sick, holiday and overtime pay.

But Jim Fitzpatrick, Labour's minister for employment relations, blocked a private member's bill to give agency workers new rights despite 115 Labour Mps - a third of the party - turning up to back the measure.

The bill was introduced by Paul Farrelly, Labour MP for Newcastle under Lyme, and was backed by the TUC and five big unions - Unison, T&G, Amicus, GMB and the CWU.

Fitzpatrick, who was once a FBU union official, used parliamentary procedure to kill the bill.

He kept speaking until time ran out.

Announcement:

Labour MEP Glyn Ford, will be coming to our April 18th meeting, at Unity Hall Yeovil to talk about issues facing Trade unionists and the European Union.

All members welcome

EU threatens right to strike

Early next month the European Court of Justice will effectively decide if workers within the European Union have a fundamental right to strike.

The EU court will hear two separate test cases on January 9 and 10 brought by Finnish shipping company Viking Line and Latvian building firm Laval against trade unionists who dared to take strike action. Viking Line took legal action against the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) after Finnish seafarers struck when the company tried to register a liner in Estonia to take advantage of 60 per lower wage costs.

Laval is claiming Swedish trade unions broke EU law when they held a strike after the Latvian company brought in lower paid Latvian workers to build a school in the Swedish town of Vaxholm.

Both cases will determine whether businesses can relocate to take advantage of cheap Eastern European labour without the threat of strike action and whether EU law overrides national laws protecting workers from exploitation.

It is no coincidence that these cases have been brought after the European parliament rubberstamped the services directive, which is designed to create a single market in services across the EU and undermine national laws on pay and conditions for workers. Not surprisingly, in a submission to the European Court of Justice, the British government claims that collective action - which includes strikes - is not a fundamental EU right and that rights guaranteeing free movement within the single market are more important.

EU internal market commissioner Charlie McCreevy has also made clear

that the European commission fully backs the Latvian company and the social dumping that it had created. "If member states continue to shield themselves from foreign company takeovers and competition, then I fear that the internal market will begin to dissolve.

"The question here is whether or not Sweden has implemented Article 49 in the treaty on free movement," he says. However, Swedish TUC (LO) vice-president Wanja Lundby-Wedin points out that industrial action is, by its very nature, an obstacle to the activities of a company and free movement

"The right to collective action is, together with freedom of association and the right to negotiate and conclude collective agreements, recognised as a fundamental right in international conventions," she says. As a result, if the ECJ finds that the industrial action taken in Vaxholm is against EU law, it would have serious consequences and not just for Nordic industrial relations systems.

"What, until now, have been regarded as fundamental rights of workers in all democratic states would be undermined in the name of free movement," says Lundby-Wedin.

For countries such as Finland, Denmark and Sweden, which have constitutional protection for trade union rights, a ruling in favour of Viking or Laval would make EU law incompatible with their domestic rules.

As a result, LO has indicated that it would withdraw support for Swedish EU membership altogether if the

The so-called "four freedoms" – the freedom of movement of goods, services, capital and labour

court rules against national collective bargaining legislation. Even leading Europhile, European TUC general secretary John Monks, argues that a court decision in favour of Viking and Laval would have serious consequences with voters in the Nordic countries.

"It would be very, very serious for them. It would tip opinion very much against the EU," he says. However, the EU is founded on the so-called "four freedoms" – the freedoms of movement of goods, services, capital and labour (meaning people) – and these are enshrined in all EU Treaty provisions.

The discredited EU constitution also contained these four "freedoms", although not the fundamental right to take strike action. However, it was possible to enshrine the right for employers to lock out workers. Whatever the outcome of these test cases, EU institutions have a clear agenda of giving big business the absolute freedom to do what it likes, when it likes and where it likes regardless of laws democratically decided by national elected parliaments.

Moreover, it gives a clear indication of how obscure and thoroughly anti-democratic EU institutions like the European Court of Justice can decide laws for over 500 million people without the knowledge of most citizens. This article from **Trade Unionists against European**

Health and Safety – urban myths

"Councils banning St George's flags."

Legalise Conkers

The TUC has busted the most common health and safety myths including schools banning conkers, safety inspectors banning ladders, acrobats being forced to wear helmets and councils banning St George's flags.

'Health and safety myths' shows that popular examples of 'health and down to the way that local schools or councils interpret the regulations. Employers will also often use 'health and safety' as an excuse for not doing something which they didn't want to do anyway or to save money, says the report.

Myth: health and safety regulations ban the use of ladders.

Truth: there is no ban on ladders but there are regulations aimed at ensuring that people use them safely. This is to reduce the number of workers seriously injured or killed falling off ladders every year. On average, 13 workers die this way each year and 12,000 are seriously injured. However, there is no ban on ladders they just have to be secured and used properly.

Myth: fire-fighter's poles have been banned on health and safety grounds.

Truth: It was reported that, to avoid the risk of injury when sliding down poles, a new Devon fire station had not been equipped with a traditional pole.

The real reason the fire

station did not have a pole was the lack of space. There are no regulations banning the use of poles in fire stations. Myth: there are now more regulations and red tape than ever.

Truth: there were more than twice as many health and safety regulations and laws 35 years ago than there are today. The legislation that remains is now generally simpler and easier to understand.

Myth: a local authority ordered the removal of St Georges' flags from outside shops on safety grounds.

Truth: this story originated in Liverpool after the local council required a shopkeeper to properly secure flags after one fell onto the windscreen of a car causing an accident. Myth: trapeze artists will be forced to wear hard hats (and Snowdon needs safety signs). Truth: This is nonsense. Hard hats are worn to prevent workers being hit by falling objects, not to protect people from falls.

They are completely inappropriate for trapeze artists and there are no regulations or plans to introduce them. A story that the Work at Height regulations will mean that safety signs will have to be erected on the side of Snowdon, is also untrue. Other myths busted in the report include cardboard egg boxes being banned from school craft lessons, small businesses being strangled by safety gone mad' are not down to bad safety law but are either untrue or inspection, compensation

claims rising dramatically and churches being forced to change 'unsafe' light bulbs. All of the myths in the TUC report can be seen by visiting an online quiz on workSMART, the TUC's working life website www.workSMART.org.uk/safetymths

<<http://www.worksmart.org.uk/safetymths>

Britons put in £23 billion of unpaid overtime a year

04/01/07. Employees in the UK who do unpaid overtime do an average of seven hours six minutes extra work a week, and would take home an extra £4,800 a year if they were paid the average wage for those unpaid hours, according to a new analysis of official statistics published by the TUC. The TUC has calculated that if everyone in the UK who works unpaid overtime did all their unpaid work at the start of the year, the first day they would get paid would be Friday 23 February (?).

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Yeovil TUC meets every third Wednesday of the month @ the above address. All members welcome. Meeting start @ 19:30hrs.