



Inside:

2. Local movement history - George Mitchell.

Around the Town & District.

3. Trade Union Freedom Bill

4. Private Equity

Make Labour Listen!

NEW Unite T&G South-West leader Andy Frampton has urged all trade unionists to join the campaign to make Labour listen and "march with a message" at the Labour Party conference in Bournemouth.

Mr Frampton urged the Labour government to close the ever-growing wealth gap in the south-west and deliver better rights for all workers across the public and private sectors.

"The event provides a fantastic opportunity for activists from both sections of the new union to come together and celebrate the strength of the new union," he said. "We need to make Gordon Brown and Labour listen to the voices of working people and their families."

Unite's march and rally, the first major event since the union was formed on May 1 by the merger of T&G and Amicus, will send a strong message to the Labour leadership and conference delegates.

The rally's main speakers will be the joint general secretaries Tony Woodley and Derek Simpson.

Unite's key demands are quality secure jobs for all, equal rights for agency workers, trade union freedom and publicly provided health and education for all,

action to close the yawning wealth inequality gap, fair pay for public-sector workers and the freedom for councils to build decent housing.

- Statutory employment rights for workers in small companies.
Ending the 21 employee threshold.
- Ending the opt-out from the Working Time Regulations to protect workers health and safety.
- Stronger corporate manslaughter laws
- Equal rights for agency and temporary workers
- Support UK manufacturing
Unite is campaigning for the following to strengthen UK manufacturing:
 - investment in apprenticeships, workforce training and an expansion in numbers of skilled manufacturing production jobs
 - restoration of the Labour rights lost during the last Conservative Government through the passage into law of the Trade Union Freedom Bill
 - compulsory social planning responsibilities for companies who decide to offshore jobs or make large scale redundancies
 - repayment of grants or other government aid given to companies that do not honour their obligations to provide secure employment to local communities
 - Pension protection
 - Build affordable housing for working people
 - End the privatisation of public services

The rally begins at 1pm on Sunday, September 23. All Trades Unionists welcome

Free Transport to the Labour Party Conference demonstration, Bournemouth Sunday 23rd September 2007

Picking up 09:15 Bridgewater; 09:45 Taunton (Outside TGWU office) and Yeovil outside Labour Club 10:30am

To book your place contact joe.conway@agustawestland.com or 07855 320041

Local movement history

GEORGE MITCHELL - 'ONE FROM THE PLOUGH'

At the Ham Hill Fayre on Saturday 8th September 2007 it is hoped that a long awaited permanent memorial to one of Somerset's 'sons of the soil' will be unveiled.

Thanks to a joint effort between the Ham Hill Countryside Park authorities and the Yeovil based TUC members, two descriptive banners will be displayed at the Ranger's Hut, detailing the life and work of George Mitchell, known as 'One from the Plough'.

George Mitchell was born in Montacute, a stone's throw from Ham Hill, in 1826. He suffered many hardships as a young lad working in the local fields during a period of depression in agriculture. Like many others he was paid a pitiful wage and had no one to turn to for help.

Mitchell eventually became a marble mason, having served his apprenticeship in the quarries on Ham Hill, and owned a very successful business in London. He did not however forget the continuing struggle that his fellow countrymen were having providing food for the nation.

In 1872 Mitchell formed the South West branch of the National Agricultural Labourer's Union. He was determined that the labourer's should have a voice and the opportunity of improving their lot.

Over the next two decades Mitchell ploughed vast sums of money into supporting the Union and its members including the funding of huge rallies on Ham Hill. The Frying Pan area of the hill would ring to the sound of political discussion, as guest speakers demanded better conditions for the labourers.

George Mitchell died in 1901 and lies in an unmarked grave in Brompton Cemetery in London. How fitting that his life and works should now be marked at the scene of his greatest achievements.

Brendon Owen, Author and Local Historian.

Around the Town & District

Local news round up – *as we go to print.*

CWU Postal workers dispute, well supported in Yeovil. The strike action is in support of a pay claim and opposition to The Royal Mail "business plan" which could have meant up to 40,000 job losses and 2,500 post office closures, Strike days suspended until 4th September, mean while negotiations continue.

Agusta/Westland pensions dispute. A highly effective picket at the Main Gate, overtime ban still on, well supported. The Company says there is a £90M shortfall and want less favourable pension for new starts.



GKN Structures have settled their dispute on pensions, but have registered a failure to agree on the issue of pay with an external conference arranged for the 8th September.

Garador dispute is ongoing. The company want to impose less favourable terms and conditions like extending the working week, reduced sickness benefits, also, the sacking of two shop stewards. The Company has it that productivity levels are lower here in Yeovil compared to their Leicester site.

National Rally for Trade Union Freedom Bill

The United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-trade Union Laws is organising a rally to support the second reading of the *Trade Union Rights and Freedoms Bill*. It is on **18th October at 7pm in Committee Room 14 at the House of Commons**.

The *United Campaign* was founded in 1998 at a Conference of 700 trade unionists, from General Secretaries to shop stewards. It was established to be a united non-sectarian trade union based campaign. Twenty-four national unions are affiliated to the Campaign as well as hundreds of trade union branches, regional bodies, Trades Union Councils as well as individual members.

Many of the current anti-trade union laws were introduced by the Conservatives between 1979 and 1995. Tony Blair wrote, on 31st March 1997, that the changes his Government introduced "would leave British law the most restrictive on trade unions in the western world." That time he wasn't lying.

These laws must be repealed, or replaced with other laws - not only because they are repressive, but also because they are illegal - they contravene the UK's international obligations under ILO Conventions, the Social Charter of the Council of Europe and United Nations declarations and covenants.

Labour laws now are worse than they were over 100 years ago. The European Green Paper published in November 2006 is a sign that we can expect nothing better, unless we act now.

Positive legislation in the field of industrial relations is required - laws which will protect trade unions from legal attacks, allow them to operate democratically and protect their members; laws which restore and extend collective bargaining, give each worker the right to strike and be represented by a union, protect workers against exploitation and provide the basis for a fairer and more just society.

Support Early Day Motion 532, Write to David Laws MP urging his support for this bill. Presented to The House of Commons 19th October 2007

See www.unitedcampaign.org.uk

National Shop Stewards Network founded

Saturday July 7th saw an important step towards reviving militant grass-roots trade unionism in Britain with the inaugural conference of the National Shop Stewards Network.

About 300 rank-and-file delegates from across the spectrum of trade unionism gathered in London to elect a steering committee and agree a programme for a new campaign to overturn decades of retreat by the trade union movement. The conference included workshops on pensions, organising migrant workers, organising young workers, fighting privatisation and supporting the Trade Union Freedom Bill.

Supporting the conference, RMT General Secretary Bob Crowe said **"If we are to roll back the tide of privatisation and war, rebuilding the grass roots of our movement is essential"**.

The conference decided:

- to immediately send messages of support to all workers in struggle;
- to organise a lobby of, and fringe meeting at, the TUC conference in Brighton in September to call for the unions to step up their efforts to end the anti-trade union laws as soon as possible;
- To support the call by PCS for a national day of action against the government's pay freeze in the public sector;
- To support all efforts to defend the NHS against cuts and closures by mobilising support for the proposed national demonstration in October;
- To organise regional conferences of shop stewards and workplace representatives, to build regional shop stewards networks and to mobilise the local unions in support of those in struggle;
- To organise a further national conference next year in the late spring;
- To give support to all workers in struggle for a decent wage, to defend their jobs and to fight for a shorter working week;
- To produce a short pamphlet on the need for a new shop stewards' movement.

See www.shopstewards.net

Barbarians at the gate

Private Equity Finance -

One in fourteen in the private sector - around 1.2million - is employed by private equity owned companies.

The TUC and affiliated unions are pressing the government to take action to curb Private Equity Finance.

These groups of investors buy large companies with vast sums of borrowed money and only small sums of their own. A common ratio for PE is 20% equity (money raised by the company taking control), to 80% borrowed from financial institutions. Some are pension funds.

Once in control, management teams are brought in. The object then is to maximise the profit quickly. In most cases further debt is taken on to pay extortionate dividends, recouping their investment within a few months.

The consequence of the debts and dividend payments brings employees under great pressure. Wages are driven down and staff made redundant.

The workers at the AA have had 3500 job losses and a regime of bullying.

Added to that, PE has found loop holes in the tax system. Nicholas Ferguson, chairman of SVG Capital, said it was wrong that private equity bosses pay tax of only 10 per cent when the basic income tax rate is 22 per cent and the higher rate is 40 per cent. "Any commonsense person would say that a highly-paid private equity executive paying less tax than a cleaning lady or other low-paid workers can't be right," he said.

The TUC is campaigning and lobbying for:

- Tighter regulation of Private Equity Companies;
 - Disclosure the same as quoted companies;
 - Publish full company accounts and annual report;
 - Trade unions to receive full information on buy-outs and future plans, with proper implementation and enforcement;
 - Protection for employees in the event of buyouts.
- The TUC urges the Treasury Committee to investigate the rise of corporate debt and its implications for economic stability.

Privateers failing to improve the AA

The GMB union recently published a report by an independent IT company it had commissioned after a series of complaints from AA staff that the current IT systems are unreliable and lead to delays in responding to breakdown calls.

The AA responded angrily to the criticisms claiming that there had been "substantial" investment in the business since the take over by private equity company, Permira, including £37M in IT.

The report was which was written by Systems Projects Ltd insisted the AA was trying to solve "a new problem with old technology."

It called on the company to "make significant investment on improving their technology" the report goes on "The AA has allowed this solution to be run down and starved of investment" moreover "The lack of investment also has other serious implications such as on the morale of the AA engineers in the field trying to work with a solution that is unworkable"

GMB General Secretary said "I told the House of Commons Treasury select committee that the private equity owners of the AA were asset stripping the business to feather their own nest to the detriment of their customers and employees. This report bears this out."

"Meanwhile, back on the front line, in the recovery patrol vehicles helping paying customers who are broken down, staff do not have the best tools to respond to the customers needs in the most efficient manner.

With private equity owners, the necessary investment in customer services comes a poor second to looking after the multi-millionaire owners."

The private equity takeover and merger of the AA and Saga has saddled the company with debts of £4.8 billion. Almost £2 billion of this has ended up in the hands of the former owners of both firms.

Printed & Published By Yeovil TUC
Unity Hall, Central Road, Yeovil Somerset BA20 1JL

Editing & Design by Bill Byrd and Vivian Willis 07855 320041 vivianvjw@aol.com

Yeovil TUC meets every third Wednesday of the month @ the above address. All members welcome. Meetings start @ 19:30hrs. Is your branch affiliated? Contact us for an application form.