

unionsouthwest

e-newsletter of the South West TUC

July 2008

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Fair transition to a greener economy

The TUC has urged the government to work more closely with employers and unions to start implementing policies that will allow the UK to become a world leader in the new green economy.

The TUC report, *A Green and Fair Future: For a Just Transition to a Low Carbon Economy* says while countries such as Germany, Denmark and Spain are creating thousands of jobs and billions of pounds in revenue by actively supporting green businesses, the UK is lagging behind. Germany has created a renewable energy sector employing almost half a million people with a turnover of 24 billion euros. In contrast, the UK employs just 7,000 in renewable energy, generating 360 million euros.

The TUC is calling on the government to look to the success of employer-union partnerships in the workplace as a guide for how active collaboration can drive green innovation in the UK and cut carbon emissions.

South West Green Workplace Project

The new South West TUC project to help unions play their part in reducing the environmental impact of work has got off to a low carbon flying start! **Lu White**, Project Coordinator and **Frances Robertson**, Project Worker are taking calls and following up leads from unions. If your union wants to discuss how to grow your green union at work call them on 0117 947 0521 southwest@tuc.org.uk

Go Green at Work

The project is making available a new TUC guide: *Go Green at Work* that gives advice on how people can measure the environmental performance of their workplace and offers useful tips on how to make the case for investment in energy saving and renewable technology in the workplace.

Greenest Tolpuddle

18-20 July

This year's Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival should be the 'greenest' yet. The South West TUC has worked hard to encourage people to come by public transport, coach or shared cars. People will be urged to recycle and leave no waste; a wind and solar generator will be tested; all caterers are expected to come with biodegradable plates and cutlery and the new South West TUC Green Workplaces project team will be on hand to give advice. The Tolpuddle Green Camp has had a good response and local environmental campaigners and advice agencies will have stalls.

The cottages and museum have had their insulation improved and solar panels are being fitted.

Derek Wall, the Green Party Principal Speaker, will address the festival and the discussions on the Saturday will include a debate over food production.

www.tuc.org.uk/tolpuddle

West universities are Green leaders

Universities from the South West have topped the People and Planet Green League 2008. The greenest university in the county is the University of Gloucestershire, the runner-up is the University of Plymouth and third is the University of the West of England, based in Bristol. The criteria includes the establishment's environmental policy, staff, auditing, Fairtrade status, ethical investment, energy suppliers, recycling, water consumption and carbon emissions.

The University and College Union (UCU) has congratulated universities doing the most to combat climate change but urged all universities to step up the involvement of staff and students in their efforts. The union called for a carbon reduction strategy on every campus based on university consultation with staff unions and student representatives.

Roger Kline, head of employment rights at UCU said: "To create a carbon reduction strategy on every campus the support of the workforce and students is essential. The greatest progress will come from strategies developed with the input of staff and students, and where there is a sense of shared ownership of the process and proposed actions."

House prices in South West are 9.3 times incomes

The South West is the most unaffordable place in the UK to buy homes, according to the National Housing Federation, with prices running at 9.3 times incomes and the average house costing more than £280,000.

To make matters worse, affordable home building is running at less than half the levels required, with housing waiting lists risen nearly 50 per cent in the last five years.

The TUC warns with house prices falling, private sector house-builders are likely to start limiting the number of new homes offered for sale at a time when the UK needs more flats and houses than ever before.

Fair Homes: Building a New Deal for Housing looks at the state of the UK housing market and says the government is right to plan to increase the rate of house-building. But with the

population increasing and people living in ever-smaller units, the report questions whether ministers' target of an extra three million homes by 2020 will be enough.

South West TUC Regional Secretary Nigel Costley said: "Everyone in the UK should be able to afford decent housing, but for many people renting a good quality flat or owning their own home remains a distant dream. The high price of housing has forced many employees to live miles from their jobs, forcing them to embark on ever-longer commutes. Similarly, workers living in poor housing are more likely to suffer from ill health, and are likely to be less productive at work. It's a problem the UK economy cannot afford to ignore."

In 1971, almost 365,000 new homes were built. In 2006, the figure was just 212,000.

Torbay: Reshaped or Pearshaped?

UNISON Torbay Local Government Branch has organised a major stakeholder conference on Friday 18th July at The Grand Hotel, Torquay, to kick-start public consultation on Torbay Council's radical "Reshaping" plans to become a commissioning authority. A report by APSE (the Association of Public Services Excellence) is highly critical of this strategy, saying it could lead to wholesale privatisation of local services on the basis of little hard evidence, and destroy local democratic accountability.

The conference is open to local businesses and employers, voluntary and community organisations, and service user representatives, as well as other stakeholders and partners including public bodies and trade unions. It will be addressed by Torbay's directly-elected Mayor Nick Bye, Lib Dem opposition leader Steve Darling, and UNISON's deputy general secretary Keith Sonnet.

More details from l.french@unison.co.uk or <http://reshaping.unisontorbay.org.uk>

TUC comment on public service reform report

Commenting on the Cabinet Office report on public services reform *Excellence and Fairness: Achieving World Class Public Services*, South West TUC Regional Secretary Nigel Costley said: "We support the focus on public service workers, particularly the aim to develop a new relationship between the government and its workforce. It is encouraging to see such a strong emphasis placed on skills, workforce development and good management. Supporting public servants in their jobs will help provide the high quality, user-focused services we all want to see.

"But the report underlines the government's continued reliance on competition and contestability as a way to reform public services. This route to reform will only serve to produce a patchwork quilt of service providers and lead to a fragmented public sector. This will seriously compromise accountability and sustainability in our public services."

Union anger over tax office closures

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) reacted angrily to the government announcement to close a further 21 offices across the South West with the loss of 161 jobs in the region.

The union warned the ability of the department to collect revenues and provide tax advice to the public and local businesses would be further undermined by the closures. Services are already suffering in HMRC with a drive to axe 25,000 jobs and close over 200 offices, leading to backlogs of work and poor staff morale.

15,000 jobs have already been cut since March 2004 with 165 offices earmarked for closure or in the process of closing. The union fears the latest proposals for more closures will accelerate the loss of skilled and experienced staff, who face an extremely uncertain future in instances where they are unable to relocate or travel to their nearest office.

David Millar, PCS Regional Secretary, said: "This announcement is part of a crude drive to slash jobs and cut costs which will leave HMRC unable to deliver quality public services. Access to tax advice in communities across the South West will be damaged by these proposals hitting businesses and the public, in rural towns and villages, as well as taking quality jobs out of local communities."

U-Net launch over-subscribed

Unionlearn is delighted about the take-up for the launch as the new U-Net centres will hand back control of learning to the ULRs and unions which get involved and will have a positive impact on organising in the workplace.

Welcome for Single Equality Bill

South West TUC Regional Secretary Nigel Costley said: "This Bill is a landmark piece of legislation which, if implemented fully, will help millions of people reach their potential at work. Beefing up the equality duties to include all major forms of discrimination will give unions the tools they need to deliver real equality where it really matters, on the shop floor. Using procurement to promote equality – an industry now worth £150 billion a year – should also have a major impact on the private sector, where the gender pay gap is nearly nine percentage points higher."

Closure of Fire Control Rooms

EDM 1874 was put down on 24th June by Stroud MP **David Drew**. Please encourage your local MP to sign it.

That this House notes the cross-party opposition to the introduction of regional fire control centres in the Fire and Rescue Service in England; further notes that 120 emergency fire control staff in the South West have received letters giving advance notice of redundancy, and that all seven fire control rooms in the region will close, and that this will be replicated across England over the next two years; supports the Fire Brigades Union in its opposition to regionalisation of fire control centres; is concerned that the Government's projection of call handling capacity at regional centres is far below the peak call volume currently handled effectively and efficiently by local fire control rooms during peak call periods including during floodings and other similar environmental events; and therefore calls on the government to abandon the regionalisation of fire control centres.

Employment rates

In period February-April 2008, employment and unemployment rates in the region were 78.7% and 4.0% respectively. Over the last year, employment has risen by 45,000 and unemployment by 6,000. The figures point to a slowdown, not a recession.

Victory for vulnerable workers

Welcoming the Home Office decision that overseas domestic workers will retain their existing protections under UK law, South West TUC Regional Secretary Nigel Costley said: "This is a victory for a very vulnerable group of workers and one for common sense. These workers will now retain the right to challenge abuse by their employers by getting another job – something that all British workers take for granted."

The TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employment, which published its report and recommendations in May, found alarming levels of abuse among overseas domestic workers. Through the charity Kalayaan, which provides advice, advocacy and support services to these

workers, the Commissioners met with women who had experienced shocking physical and emotional abuse at the hands of their employers.

Migrant Project gets going

The new migrant workers' project, hosted by Equality South West will be introduced to the South West TUC Regional Council. Charlie Dorr and Monika Stennett will speak to the meeting on Saturday 5th July in Bristol. They are already circulating advice and information including:

[The Impact of migration from the new European Union Member States on native workers-](#)

which confirms what we already know- that migrants are not having a negative impact on the employment prospects and wages of native workers.

[Managing the Impacts of Migration: A Cross-Government Approach-](#) which highlights current government initiatives on migration policy.

[Review of Migrant Integration Policy in the UK \(including a feasibility study of the proposal for an Integration Agency\)](#) - announces that the government will not be creating an Integration Agency to coordinate the integration of migrants but that instead CLG will strengthen its own role in this area and look at developing an integration strategy.

Tier 1 of New Points Based Migration System Launched

<http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/tier1launch>

The first tier of the government's new points base system came into effect on Monday. This tier effects all 'highly skilled' workers, entrepreneurs and investors who want to come to the UK. Under the new system, applicants will need to earn points to satisfy the visa service that they can make a 'positive contribution' to the United Kingdom. Points will be awarded for a range of criteria including qualifications, previous earnings, age and United Kingdom experience.

Charles Dorr charles.dorr@equalitysouthwest.org.uk and **Monika Stennett** monika.stennett@equalitysouthwest.org.uk

Tony Benn DVD available now

The NUJ's Bristol Branch has produced a video of Tony Benn's inaugural lecture given at a packed Arnolfini in November 2006, entitled 'Reflecting critically on making the news'. You can get a copy from **Tony Gosling** on 0117 944 6219 or tony@tlio.org.uk.

Free Pride in Bournemouth . . .

This year's Bourne Free Pride Festival will be taking over Bournemouth for 3 days, from Friday 11th until Sunday 13th of July. The "Support our Services" themed procession through Bournemouth will start at 1pm on Saturday 12th July in Meyrick Park. It will travel alongside the Town Hall, the busy shopping areas of The Square and The Triangle, Pier Approach and Westover Road.

The event is a colourful celebration of the diverse communities that live in the area and the constant strive towards universal equality for all – through entertainment and awareness.

More details from www.bournefree.co.uk

... and Swindon

Swindon is staging its first ever Gay Pride on August 16th, in the Old Town Gardens. They are looking for sponsors. More details from www.swindonpride.kk5.org/

The search for the UK's Barak Obama comes to Bristol

Operation Black Vote has organised a conference to discuss the political alienation of black minority groups, particularly young people, and look at innovative ways of empowerment. Apprentice star Tre Zam and OBV director Simon Woolley are among the speakers. The event, at the Barton Hill Settlement, Barton Hill, Bristol at 1.30pm on Thursday, July 17, is free but seats are restricted. More details from faz@obv.org.uk.

Right time for right to request time to train

Commenting on the government's consultation which should see workers being given a new legal right to request time to train at work, South West unionlearn Manger **Helen Cole** said: "Decent, high quality and regular training in all workplaces is key to achieving a highly skilled workforce that can compete in the global economy. Sensible employers know that providing their staff with training makes business sense, but unfortunately there are still far too many employers who don't think training is their concern, and who never give their employees the chance to learn new skills.

"This new right could make a real difference to the learning landscape in the UK. If it proves as successful as the right to request flexible working has been, then millions of workers across the UK could find themselves on courses that will update their skills, making them not only more productive, but also in a better position to move on up into more highly paid, better skilled jobs."

Get to the heart of the Martyrs

Pupils from Beaminster School performed a play about the Tolpuddle Martyrs outside the TUC museum in the village. The play recreated the Martyrs struggle in the face of declining wages and increasing poverty, and showed the harsh conditions Dorset farmworkers endured in the 19th century, which led to workers organising themselves together and forming the early trade unions.

The play was a new adaptation of Tolpuddle by **Graham Padden** with music and songs by Graham Moore.

South West TUC regional secretary **Nigel Costley** said: "It's great to see school students using their local history to learn about current affairs as well as enjoying drama and music. The story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs is rich with lessons for us today as well as showing how life has changed in Dorset over the years."

Women's low pay is the key to child poverty

The Iron Triangle, the TUC's new briefing on child poverty, reveals that tackling women's low pay is the key to ending child poverty. Based on research by the TUC, the End Child Poverty coalition and the Fawcett Society, the report shows a clear majority of children in poverty (57%) live in a family where one or more adults have jobs.

Working women are far more likely than men to be in low-paid jobs. The briefing reveals 30 per cent of working women have an income of less than £100 a week, compared to just 14

per cent of men. Women are far more likely to work in poorly paid part-time jobs – more than 75 per cent of part-time workers are female, with an average hourly wage of £9.65. Another essential link between low pay, women's poverty and child poverty is the employment discrimination that many mothers face. Mothers in Britain are far more likely to be poor than anywhere else in Europe and from the moment they conceive a child women face immediate financial penalties – thousands lose their jobs and many more face disadvantage and reduced opportunities in the workplace.

Keep the Promise

The TUC is rallying union support for *Keep the Promise*: a national demonstration against child poverty, organised by the End Child Poverty coalition, to take place in London on Saturday 4 October.

International Festival of Culture in Yeovil

The Somerset Polish Community Association is holding an International Festival of Culture at Yeovil Town Football Club on 27 July from 10am – 4pm. There will be an international football tournament, food from many different cultures, diverse cultural music and performance.

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If you have news that you want to share with the trade union movement in the South West - let the South West TUC know about it.

If you want your name taken off this list please let me know. Please pass on to others in your contact list. If you have received this indirectly and want to be added to the South West TUC list please let the South West TUC Office know on ncostley@tuc.org.uk.

Nigel Costley

South West TUC Regional Secretary

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