

unionsouthwest

e-newsletter of the South West TUC

August 2008

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Union membership holds steady

Trade union membership in the South West is holding steady at around 650,000 according to the latest government figures. Some 1.2 million people work in organisations with unions in the West Country.

Membership amongst women continues to rise and they are now just as likely to be union members as their male colleagues. Unions have continued to increase membership amongst managerial and professional staff.

The figures show a decade of stable union membership. TUC figures are more optimistic with the largest rise in membership in unions belonging to the TUC in a decade. This increase is almost certainly the result of the huge resources unions have put in to reaching out to young workers – the next generation of union members.

Nigel Costley South West TUC Regional Secretary said: “It’s good to see union membership holding steady despite this year’s major economic difficulties, and my advice to workers worried about further shocks to the economy would be to join a union as soon as they can. If nothing else, these figures show trade union members tend to earn more than non-members, earning an average of £12.74 an hour compared to £11.02 an hour.

Reinstate the Bristol Three

Postal workers Colin Tucker, Kay Gibbs and Paula Franklin have been sacked by the Post Office for alleged incidents during the postal dispute last year.

The Communication Workers Union is campaigning for their reinstatement.

A march and rally to demand their reinstatement will be held on

Monday 4 August

Bristol

Assemble at the bandstand at Castle Park at 2.30pm

The Rally will then be held at the

Central Promenade Bristol City Centre

www.cwu.org 020 8971 7200

Top tips

West Country workers in the region's hospitality industry will be cheered by the government's decision to stop employers using tips to top up pay to the minimum wage. Tourism and restaurant employers pay some of the lowest rates in the economy and unions have been campaigning to end the loophole that allows them to absorb tips into the minimum wage.

Nigel Costley South West TUC Regional Secretary said: "Most ordinary people think the current loophole in the law is unfair because it allows unscrupulous employers to cheat workers out of the tips that are meant for them. The Government is right to make sure that workers can keep their tips and that the responsibility to pay the minimum wage rests squarely with employers."

Youth at Work

Thursday 9 October 10am-3.30pm

Genesis Centre, Taunton

A trade union conference for young workers

The South West TUC is organising a conference for and about young workers. The event will highlight the way that unions can help young workers and will provide a forum for debate and learning around the issues that affect young people at work.

For more details contact South West TUC on southwest@tuc.org.uk or call 0117 947 0521

Apprentices attract women says top Tory

David Willetts, Conservative Shadow Higher Education Secretary, has been criticised for his statement that young men need to become apprentices to help them attract women! He explained that apprenticeships should be "part of a far bigger ambition to produce more marriageable working-class men, more stable families and less crime."

"Women," he claimed are: "not feeling that they need to marry men because men are not earning enough to support them." His stereotype of apprentices led **Brendan Barber**, TUC General Secretary to respond: "Whilst apprenticeships are important for young men, women and men from all ages and backgrounds need access to high-quality, decently paid training."

Oppose cuts in South West ticket offices

Rail unions RMT and TSSA are urging people to oppose South West Trains plan to cut ticket office opening hours at Axminster, Honiton, Yeovil Junction, Poole, Weymouth, Salisbury, Sherborne, Wareham and Parkstone.

The unions believe that:

- Ticket machines will not be able to offer the same range of tickets and fares and advice on ticket and fare options as that provided by staff.
- Machines may be vandalised or faulty. This could result in journeys being abandoned or passengers boarding trains without tickets leading to difficult situations between passengers and rail staff.
- The proposals could disproportionately impact on those passengers who have a disability.
- Many passengers will no longer be able to purchase their weekday tickets at the weekend causing not only inconvenience but also longer queues during peak time.
- Weekend closures will hit those who use trains for leisure and visits to friends and family.
- The proposals will heighten passenger security concerns.

The passenger watchdog, Passenger Focus, has the power to object to the cuts. If an objection is made then plans are referred to the Department for Transport for a final decision.

You can object to the cuts by writing to: Passenger Focus, Freepost, RRRE-ETTC-LEET, PO Box 4257, Manchester, M60 3AR no later than 5 August

You can also contact Passenger Focus at their website at www.passengerfocus.org.uk or email info@passengerfocus.org.uk

Butler and Tanner re-opens

Butler and Tanner, the Somerset-based printing firm, is to reopen on August 1 with 80 of its former 300 staff after a high-profile campaign by Unite.

The business has been bought for £500,000 by Felix Dennis, the man behind Maxim magazine and one of Britain's most successful publishers.

The printer which will be renamed Butler, Tanner and Dennis will remain in Frome, after creditors and directors spent the last few days thrashing out a deal.

Mapping the misery

South West PCS have produced a map to show the damage being done to civil service jobs in the region. See www.pcs.org.uk/sw

FBU keep up fight against regional controls

Government plans to close 46 local fire control rooms and replace them with nine regional centres have been in the pipe-line for almost five years. The South West is the 'guinea pig'

region and although all the local fire authorities have agreed to proceed their support is conditional on promised savings.

John Drake, FBU Regional Secretary said: “This is not yet a done deal. If allowed to go ahead this will have a devastating impact on local accountability and response times. Community and firefighter safety will be reduced. The FBU have been proved right at every step of this shambolic project.”

See <http://www.fbu.org.uk/campaigns/outofcontrol/index.php> for more.

South West TUC gets a green gong

The independent Charity Sustainability South West celebrated ten years of work at its annual sustainability summit. As part of the celebrations it presented some ‘Sustainability Oscars’ to emphasise the need for everyone to live in ways that will improve and sustain the quality of our lives and that of future generations.

Sustainability awards were received by **Nigel Costley**, Regional Secretary South West TUC, for work with trade unions; **Dr Gabriel Scally**, Regional Director of Public Health for the South West, for his work in the Health sector; **Simon Graham**, Environmental Strategy Adviser, for sustainability initiatives Commercial Ltd and to **Jane Henderson**, Chief Executive of the South West Regional Development Agency in recognition of the agency’s work towards a low carbon economy.

Taking the opportunity to look back over the past ten years at the summit, Sustainability South West’s president, and top government adviser on sustainability, **Jonathon Porritt**, told the Charity that it had established a national reputation for its work, and paid tribute to all those ‘countless’ individuals and organisations who have contributed over the years.

Sustainability South West will be looking at how best to use its decade of experience to champion faster progress on sustainability. It welcomed news that public health resources will fund a new post to focus on sustainability and health in the region. An immediate job over the coming months will be to complete an appraisal of proposals for tidal power in the Severn Estuary against sustainability principles.

“We all need to see *ourselves* as leaders in this challenge – at home, at work and in our communities,” urged **Leslie Watson**, Sustainability South West Director “We all share the same home, our one and only planet and the choice to move to a safer, healthier future is in *each of our hands*.”

Bridgwater Senior Citizens Forum and Trades Union Council

Bridgwater old age centenary pension rally

Saturday 13 September

assemble in the Blake Gardens, Bridgwater

10.30 am march to the Town Hall where an information fair is being held - attending: Age Concern Somerset, Pensions Service, SCC Adult Social Care, etc.,

Speaker: Dot Gibson, National Pensioners Convention

Contacts: Phil Sealey 01278662683, Malcolm Banwell 01278451659, Dave Chapple 01278450562

Cornwall Pride

Saturday 23 August

Truro

An event that all people in Cornwall can be proud of - from whatever background or lifestyle.

Cornwall Pride Chair **Christian Diamant** said "The idea of Pride is to be an all inclusive celebration of diversity in Cornwall. Everyone will be welcome to participate in the parade through Truro and then onto celebrations afterwards."

"Cornwall Pride is celebrating the fact that Cornwall is a better place because not everyone is white, not everyone is straight and that Cornwall would be a worse place if we were all the same!

info@cornwallpride.com 07872324821 or 01209 313 992 www.cornwallpride.com

Migrant points mean problems

The new Points Based System for non-EU migrants is attracting serious concerns from unions, community organisations and businesses.

It will all end in tiers

Top points go to Tier 1, open to 'highly skilled migrants'. The £2800 maintenance charge for the main applicant, plus £1600 per dependent is a serious deterrent and fewer than 100 people from India had submitted applications since Tier 1 opened. The maintenance fee for a family of four from Ghana would be equivalent to £86,000 in the UK.

Tier 2, aimed at 'skilled migrants with a UK job offer' and due to open in November 2008, has also already generated widespread concern. Tier 2 represents the only means of general labour recruitment from abroad. Tier 2 will also introduce significant new responsibilities for employers of migrants, causing anxiety among small and large companies.

Jobs which will be eligible under Tier 2 must meet a skill benchmark of NVQ Level 3 - a higher skill level than that required by a number of existing Work Permit schemes. The Bangladeshi and Chinese restaurant owners have been vocal in their concern about the impact of this benchmark on their staff. The Bangladeshi Caterers Association, for example, estimates that 250,000 jobs in the UK are reliant on the 'curry sector'. Many of these jobs will not qualify as skilled jobs although caterers insist that they will continue to need migrants' ethnic know-how to carry out these jobs effectively.

Care workers

The new scheme will affect the 19,000 migrants currently working as senior care workers in the UK. Care homes have come to rely on nurses from the Philippines and Africa and fear the impact if these are forced to leave. The Home Office believe that these positions commonly require lower skills than NVQ Level 3, throwing into jeopardy the visas of the majority of migrant senior care workers in the country.

Domestic workers win victory

A long-standing controversy over the position of domestic workers under the managed

migration scheme has been resolved, at least for the time being, following intense campaigning from the domestic migrant workers organisation Kalayaan and unions.

An estimated 17,000 domestic workers enter the UK from outside the EU with their employers each year, through a renewable domestic worker visa which allows them the flexibility to change employers without risking possible leave to remain after five years. However, up until June 2008, the Home Office was pushing ahead with plans to subsume domestic worker visas under Tier 5 of the Points-Based System (PBS) - reducing visa duration to a non-extendable 6 month stay and preventing domestic workers from changing employers during their stay. This proposal was met with fierce criticism from campaigners, who argued that the vulnerability of workers employed in private households to abuse and exploitation would be greatly increased.

Devon Welcome Pack

Advice packs for migrant workers in Devon have been produced.

For the online version go to: www.devonsp.org.uk/migrant_workers/

Councils are failing women at risk

Local authorities in the South West risk breaking the law if they fail to ensure women have access to rape crisis centres and refuges. This stark warning was issued at a women's conference in Taunton, at which delegates will discuss the important issues affecting women in the region.

One of those issues is violence against women – something that affects three million women every year in the UK.

Holly Dustin from End Violence Against Women, reminded local authorities of their responsibilities under the Gender Equality Duty. "Violence against women is far more common than we think and when it happens to someone we know we expect there to be support to help them flee the violence and rebuild their lives.

"Yet, the reality is that one in three local authorities across the UK do not have rape crisis centres, refuges or other specialist women's services - those authorities who fail to ensure that women have the support they need are at risk of court action."

Dignity! Period. campaign

Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA) will be promoting the Dignity! Period. campaign with Bodyform to provide sanitary products to the women of Zimbabwe, through ZCTU.

Period wrist bands and Dignity pin badges are available for £2 each. These are available on a sale or return basis for unions to sell. Email info@actsa.org to place an order. If you would like someone from ACTSA to speak to your union about the Dignity campaign, please contact campaigns@actsa.org

Solidarity with the workers of Iran

A year ago, **Mansour Osanloo**, President of the ITF-affiliated Vahed Syndicate – the Tehran Bus Workers' Union - was brutally removed from a bus near his home in Tehran by unidentified security personnel. The ITF, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and Amnesty International are pledging that Osanloo will not be forgotten and demanding his release.

In a statement calling for solidarity with Osanloo and all Iranian workers the ITF, ITUC and Amnesty International also state that Osanloo's union, the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, must be recognised as a legitimate expression of its members' needs, and that the deliberate attempt to crush independent trade unions must cease.

<http://www.itfglobal.org/press-area/index.cfm/pressdetail/2326>

Tolpuddle tops records

The sun returned to the Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival and, with it, came record crowds eager to see Tony Benn, the Levellers and the Alabama 3.

The event took on a new dimension as fans of the two bands mingled with thousands of trade unionists from all over the country. "We knew we were in for a bumper year when around 1,500 campers turned up on the Friday night," said organiser **Nigel Costley**, Regional Secretary of the South West TUC.

"With more people arriving to camp on the Saturday, the day-trippers and coaches coming on Sunday, the site was buzzing all weekend. The festival goes from strength to strength because the mix of music and politics is one that engages people at all different levels. It's no wonder this is such an important event in the trade union calendar."

The length of the rally meant the second round of speeches was delayed for half an hour, giving people time to return to the stage.

Tim Lezard South West TUC Chair said: "I'm the chair of the South West TUC . . . and this is our party." He went on to challenge the crowd to bring back friends next year and make the event even bigger.

He was followed by **Brendan Barber**, TUC General Secretary, who said: "We have a battle on our hands to win fair pay for all and to win back rights for workers. We know the law is against us, so we must keep fighting to deliver dignity for workers."

Tolpuddle favourite and Labour Movement favourite **Tony Benn** received a standing ovation before even opening his mouth. "Young people have a chance that none of us have ever had. They have the money and technology to change the world if they use them wisely. No matter how much technology changes, moral decisions don't change. Are things right or wrong? We should always look to treat people as we ourselves want to be treated."

He returned for an encore, during which he said: "Caring for the environment isn't about not flying a helicopter or re-using a plastic bag, it's about shortage. It's about making sure that oil and water are allocated so people don't die of starvation while others are living it up and fighting wars.

The Levellers had the crowd dancing with an hour-long set including old favourites such as *Beautiful Day* and *One Way*, before the main stage closed with a storming set by the acoustic members of the **Alabama 3**.

My Tolpuddle book proves a winner

The new book of Tolpuddle memories, compiled by Tim Lezard and Nigel Costley was launched at this year's festival and has won lots of acclaim. It is a scrap book of thoughts and reflections on the way the Tolpuddle Martyrs have been remembered.

It is available on-line at www.tuc.org.uk/tolpuddle

New Assembly Chair

The South West Regional Assembly has appointed Sir Simon Day (Conservative, Devon County Council) as its new Chairman replacing Cllr Jill Shortland, who had been Chair since 2006. Deputy Chair is Councillor Helen Holland (Labour, Bristol City Council). The Vice Chairs were confirmed as Councillor Keith Ross (Independent, West Somerset Council), Councillor Humphrey Temperley (Liberal Democrat, Devon County Council), and Chris Irwin (Social, Environmental and Economic Partners, TravelWatch South West).

Black Development Agency jobs

Three posts are currently being advertised at BDA.

BRIGHT Project Development Manager – **closing date 7 August**

Outreach & Development Worker (South Gloucestershire) – **closing date 4 August**

Outreach & Development Worker (Bristol) – **closing date 4 August**

email info@blackdeva.org.uk for more details.

Refugee Action jobs

Refugee Action is an independent, national charity working to enable refugees to build new lives in the UK. We provide advice & advocacy to asylum seekers & refugees, awareness raising & training, community & service development work & projects to support vulnerable groups.

We have recently won funding to deliver the 'Refugee Integration & Employment Service' in the South West. If you would like to find out more about the jobs, please go to www.refugee-action.org/jobs or call 020 7832 1682.

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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

0117 947 0521 www.tuc.org.uk/southwest