

unionsouthwest

e-newsletter of the South West TUC

January 2013

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Sad news as Dee dies

Dee Rogers, the former co-ordinator for Bargaining for Skills in the South West and Unionlearn project worker died unexpectedly in her sleep just before Christmas. Dee took early retirement in 2011 and was a well known and popular figure in Wiveliscombe in Somerset.

Nigel Costley, South West TUC Regional Secretary, said: "Dee was a proud trade unionist and pioneer for learning at work. She was the first to lead the union learning project in the South West at a time when many people needed to be convinced that unions had a role in this agenda. Dee helped prove the case and the value to trade unions and kicked off a range of activities across the South West."

Helen Cole, unionlearn South West Regional Manager said: "Dee was a valued and committed member of the unionlearn team, always supporting her colleagues and inspiring union reps and their members with her integrity and creativity.

She was passionate about improving the lives of working people through learning and made a significant contribution towards achieving this. She will be sadly missed by all who knew her."

Before joining the TUC, Dee worked for Unison in Somerset. She leaves two children, Tom and Beth. The funeral will take place on Friday 11th January at 12.30pm at Taunton Deane Crematorium. In memory of Dee, people attending will wear purple, her favourite colour.

Ron Dyer

Ron Dyer, the former warden at the Tolpuddle Martyrs' Museum and cottages has died. Ron was a farm worker and activist in the T&GWU and was a popular figure when he looked after the six cottages and small museum in Tolpuddle. After his retirement in 1989 he became one of the residents in one of the cottages built to commemorate the six martyrs and carried on supporting the annual rally and the local activities of the Agricultural Union. Details of the funeral will be announced shortly.

Farewell to Jack Hart

Jack Hart was the Secretary of the GCHQ trade unions during the long campaign against the union ban and the sacking of those who refused to give up union membership. He died at the end of November and his funeral, in Cheddon Fitzpaine, in Somerset paid tribute to his life and his determination to overturn Thatcher's ban on unions. Hugh Lanning, PCS Deputy General Secretary, knew Jack well and spoke of the outrage felt by GCHQ workers at the accusation that union membership implied disloyalty to Britain. Former general secretaries Rodney Bickerstaffe and John Sheldon joined the packed church and heard Jack's daughter Kate describe life growing up not really knowing what her father did. His son Des, now an official for the NUT, spoke of his father's strong trade union values.

Stronger unions is the key for Frances

Frances O'Grady has taken over as TUC General Secretary and immediately launched a fierce attack on the government's austerity programme.

In her first message Frances said: "The government is failing to offer people a vision for the economy or hope for the future. We do not have an economy that works for ordinary families. There has been a long-term decline in quality, skilled, well-paid jobs that should make up the back-bone of the labour force, as the short-term interests of banking and finance dominated the economy over the last few decades.

"This is why I want to campaign for three priorities in the year ahead.

"First we need the government to change course and abandon the austerity that is doing more harm than good. That means stopping self-defeating spending cuts, and instead putting investment in jobs and growth first.

"Second we need a long-term vision of how we can make an economy that works for the many. That means leadership from the very top of government to drive a new industrial policy, including investment in the country's infrastructure, affordable homes and transport.

"Third we need to build a fair society - one where we really are all in it together. The economic model that we have followed since the 1980s has led to a huge increase in the gap between the super-rich and the rest of us."

The key for the first woman to lead the British trade union movement is rebuilding union influence in all workplaces. Frances stressed: "Stronger unions must be a vital part of creating a better Britain, helping to re-balance power back towards ordinary people.

Bust the welfare myths

A timely poll from You Gov, commissioned by the TUC found widespread ignorance about spending on welfare, the reality of unemployment, the generosity of benefits and the level of fraud.

The poll confirms widespread hostile attitudes to welfare - with more than 40% believing benefits are too generous and 59% agreeing the current welfare system has created a culture of dependency. But these views are based on welfare myths.

On average, people think 41% of the entire welfare budget goes on benefits to unemployed people, while the true figure is 3%.

On average, people think 27% of the welfare budget is claimed fraudulently; the government's own figure is 0.7%.

On average, people think almost half those (48%) who claim Jobseeker's Allowance go on to claim it for more than a year, while the true figure is just under 30% (27.8%).

On average, people think that an unemployed couple with two school-age children would get £147 in Jobseeker's Allowance - more than 30% higher than the £111.45 they would actually receive - a £35 over-calculation.

Plans to cut safety inspections

The Health and Safety Executive has opened a consultation on local authority safety enforcement. The move is in response to the Löfstedt review recommendation for HSE to be given a stronger role in directing local authority health and safety inspection activity to ensure regulators take a more consistent and proportionate approach to enforcement. The plans will stop proactive inspections of premises that the Government considers "low risk".

The proposal is likely to considerably reduce the work that some local authorities do with employers who have high levels of occupational health issues. The consultation is available online at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/consult/condocs/cd247.htm>

Massive renewable energy potential in channel

A new report from by renewable energy experts Regen South West and consultancy firm Marine Energy Matters suggests that a combination of innovative technologies could generate significant low carbon energy and economic benefits from the Bristol Channel, without the need for a large scale barrage.

The discussion document *Bristol Channel Energy: A Balanced Technology Approach*, proposes a new strategy to harness the massive energy potential of the Bristol Channel in a way which balances the imperative to generate low carbon energy with the protection of the environment and communities on both the Welsh and English sides of the channel.

The multi technology strategy outlined in the report would utilise new concepts such as tidal lagoons and tidal fences, deployed in conjunction with tidal stream technology, wave and wind power.

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As well as helping to address environmental concerns the Balanced Technology approach also questions whether a big barrage option is the best way to generate sustainable jobs and economic growth. While the barrage would certainly create jobs during the construction phase previous analysis commissioned by DECC suggests that the new jobs created would largely be offset by the job losses due to the impact on Bristol Port and other marine users, including the manufacturing and distribution companies which depend on the port to support global trade.

Having been rejected as a strategic option by the government as recently as 2010, the question of whether to support a large scale barrage in the Bristol Channel will once again be reviewed by the Energy and Climate Change Parliamentary Select Committee. The report authors hope that the renewed focus on the Bristol Channel as an energy resource will lead to a wider review to look at all potential technologies.

[Download a copy of the document](#)

Living wage attracts customers

In a new poll of 1,163 people in full and part time work, performed by Survation as part of the Unions21 Fair Work Commission found that three quarters of working people (74%) would be more likely to buy products or services from a company that pays its workforce the Living Wage rather than the Minimum Wage.

Director of Unions21 Dan Whittle said: “Unfair pay is the top barrier to fairness. Our polling shows people want pay rises at the bottom and pay restraint at the top to make pay fairer.”

March against the cuts

Dorchester, Saturday 9th February 10am-noon

Dorchester, Weymouth, Portland and District Trades Union Council is organising a protest march in Dorchester in opposition to cuts to public services.

The County Council will be announcing its budget on Valentine’s day. Lee Rhodes, Secretary of the Trades Council said: “The Trades Council would like to pick up on the timing and take the opportunity to ask politicians to show their love for public services and not to massacre them.... You get the idea I am sure!”

If you feel that you could provide practical support, such as stewards for the march, or if you would like any further information, please contact Lee on lee@the-rhodes.org.uk

South West TUC Rep Awards 2013 closing soon

Just a few days left to make your nominations as the closing date approaches - [make your nomination](#) here or go to www.bit.ly/repawards2013

The awards will recognise reps from workplaces and trade unions across the South West.

2013 Award categories:

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- Union Representative Award
- Health & Safety Representative Award
- Union Learning Representative Award
- Union Equalities Award
- Most Promising New Rep Award (for reps appointed or elected since January 2011)
- Union Campaigning & Organising Award (for groups or individuals)

TUC Reps training courses

Details of courses starting this term are on the [unionlearn website](#) - including stage 1, stage 2 and diploma courses for health & safety reps, union reps/shop stewards and learning reps. [Download a course booklet here.](#)

Also some short courses have been added to the programme for early 2013:

- Trade Unions and the Environment (Bristol) - starts Friday 11 January
- Cancer in the Workplace (Taunton) - starts Wednesday 16 January
- Mental Health Awareness (Bristol and Taunton) - starts Wednesday 20 February
- Cancer in the Workplace (Plymouth) - starts Tuesday 5 March

To get more information on these short courses, and to check places are available or to apply contact Jeff Kemble (for Bristol and Taunton courses) on 0117 312 5607 or John Terry (for Plymouth courses) on 01752 305 020

The case for social partnership

The need to involve trade unions in the planning of European funded projects has been made by Nigel Costley South West TUC Regional Secretary. The latest European Social Fund Convergence newsletter features a piece on 'social partnership' - a feature of all EU structures in which trade union representatives have to be included. See the article [here](#)

The government is currently consulting on using Local Enterprise Partnerships as the key bodies to steer future EU funding. LEPs, however, exclude trade union reps and would need to form wider partnerships to conform to EU rules. The government has also said that the 39 LEPs (six in the South West) is too many to cope with the complex needs of EU funds and they will need to cluster together.

Rail fares outstrip pay again

Rail commuters are set for another year of fare misery and service cuts, unions warn.

Train fares will increase by 3.9 per cent, on average, with some passengers facing hikes of up to 10 per cent on their journeys.

Research published last month by the TUC's Action for Rail campaign shows that average train fares have risen nearly three times faster than average wages since the beginning of the recession in 2008.

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As well as being asked to pay more passengers also face the prospect of ticket office closures and fewer staff on trains and stations.

Train operators are expected to make significant cuts to jobs in 2013 in an attempt to find £3.5bn savings across the rail industry by 2018/19 - a target set by the government in response to the McNulty Review published last year.

Passenger surveys consistently demonstrate that the travelling public want more staff on trains and at stations and currently over half of the tickets purchased nationally are through face-to-face contact with ticket office or train staff.

TUC General Secretary and chair of Action for Rail Frances O'Grady said: "I understand the frustration felt by many commuters. At a time when real wages are falling and household budgets are being squeezed, rail travellers are being forced to endure yet another year of inflation-busting fare increases."

Con-Dem Love

Based on a true story, [Con-Dem Love](#) is a new song by Kevin Robbins describes the torment, fear and helplessness faced by many disabled people. People who are refused entitlement to disability support by Atos, a company acting on behalf of this Con-Dem Government.

Pill Pilots to Proletarians

From the earliest days of recorded history river pilots have navigated ships through the dangerous waters of the Bristol Channel and up the river Avon, with its twisting bends, shifting sand banks and strong currents. Pilots were self-employed and competition was fierce. The first pilot to board an incoming ship secured pilotage rights.

Pilots lived almost exclusively in Crockerne Pill, a small village, five miles from Bristol. Bristol authorities, and many town-dwellers, often regarded them as disorderly and difficult. With increasing threats from Steam Packets and tugs, the pilots and watermen of Pill had much in common with trade unionists in Bristol and the wider labour movement.

Pirates to Proletarians: The Experience of the Pilots and Watermen of Crockerne Pill in the Nineteenth Century by Michael Richardson tells the story of the Pill pilots. The new pamphlet is published by the Bristol Radical History Group is available from Pill Resource Centre; Hydra Books, 34 Old Market Bristol, BS2 0EZ; the M Shed, Princes Wharf, Wapping Road Bristol BS1 4RN; and Bloom and Curl, 74 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB.

A bottom-up account of Occupy Wall Street

Centre for Employment Studies Research

Tuesday, 22nd January 2pm-4pm

Room 3A022, UWE, Frenchay Campus , Coldharbour Lane, Bristol BS16 1QY

with [Professor Ruth Milkman](#)

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Changing the Subject: A Bottom-Up Account of Occupy Wall Street in New York City
Ruth Milkman is a sociologist of labour and labour movements. She is currently a Professor of Sociology at the City University of New York Graduate Center and at the Joseph F. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies, where she also serves as Academic Director.

Beyond Capitalism? Sustainable Business Strategies for the 21st Century

Wednesday 23rd January 6pm-7.30pm

Plymouth University

Mark Serwotka PCS General Secretary

To register contact jean.almond@plymouth.ac.uk

followed by a light buffet and networking from 7.30pm onwards.

Confronting women's poverty: turning things around

Bristol City Hall, College Green, Bristol BS1 5TR

Friday 8th March (International Women's Day) 9.30am - 3pm

This free event will welcome national speakers to Bristol, alongside representatives from organisations in the South West that are committed to addressing the impact of government policies on poverty.

These government policies have led to unprecedented levels of poverty among women (and men) in terms of welfare cuts, increased debt, loss of housing benefit, rising fuel and food bills, and more. These policies have widened the gap between rich and poor.

Bristol's Confronting Women's Poverty event will highlight the everyday reality of women's poverty, as well as work towards finding positive solutions to turn things around.

For further information: confrontingpoverty@gmail.com Twitter: @ConfrontPoverty

[Blog Bristol Fawcett](#)