

# Trades Union Councils' Programme of Work 2008-2009

Trades Union Councils represent an important form of union organisation: local trade union branches acting together in pursuit of a common agenda within the community. The capacity for a reinvigorated Trades Union Council to take action and to mobilise workers in support of campaigns is vast. Trades Union Councils should act on this by working with trade union branches to build organisation locally, but they must also take a lead in forging links with other parts of the community. Crucial to this is identifying issues on which unions and other organisations share a common agenda – an agenda based on the pursuit of social justice.

Our argument has to be that only through union strength can we win rights at work and deliver a better quality of life for people throughout society. Trades Union Councils need to make the case for a broad coalition, which tackles injustices, both in the workplace and in the community. This Programme of Work provides a framework for Trades Union Council action to build union organisation, form community alliances and raise the profile of the labour movement generally.

This year's programme identifies five broad areas of work. These are Vulnerable Workers, Combating the Far Right, Public Services, Trades Union Council Activity in the Community and Manufacturing. It is also recognised that there should be two cross cutting themes of environment and employment rights.

## **Vulnerable Workers**

As the TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employments showed the lack of trade union organisation is a major factor in causing and perpetuating workers vulnerability. Trades Union Councils can therefore play a significant role in fighting

the exploitation of these workers through helping them organise.

A second course of action which would help vulnerable workers is to ensure their employment rights are respected. Unionisation is one means of enforcement another is such statutory agencies as the Gangmasters Licensing Authority. Trades Union Councils should assist the GLA where they can and support the campaign to have their area of responsibility extended to all agency workers.

While not all vulnerable workers are migrant workers they are over represented amongst vulnerable workers. Many migrant workers have additional problems due to their lack of knowledge of English and the UK's institutions and laws. All of which heightens their vulnerability. They may also be subject to xenophobia and racist attacks.

Trades Union Councils should promote the economic and social case for migrant workers. Without migrant labour many of our public services could not function e.g. health. Migrant workers are helping to grow the economy and are net contributors – to a greater extent on average than non-migrant workers.

Trades Union Councils should:

- work with unions to identify workplaces which have unorganised migrant workplaces
- work with faith groups with a particular interest in migrant communities
- work with community groups and unions to ensure that health and safety legislation is understood by migrant workers and complied with in their work environment
- develop links with community groups to support migrant workers

- identify people with language skills who can help to talk to migrant workers
- help migrant workers gain access to English language courses
- organise advice surgeries for migrant worker
- use informal or social events to initially draw in migrant workers
- TUCJCC to compile a report from Trades Union Councils on best practice
- create links with ethnic minority self-help groups and Community Relations Councils to promote equality at work and celebrate diversity

### **Combating Far Right**

Our work in combating the far right becomes a priority particularly in North West and Yorkshire and Humberside in the European Election in 2009. It is therefore vital that the maximum unity and working together is achieved. Local Trade Union Councils and County Associations working closely with anti-fascists need to establish broad based anti-fascist coalitions.

- the resources and experience of both Searchlight and Unite Against Fascism, where appropriate, can be useful
- work with the local media to dispel fascist and racist myths about migrant workers
- involve the Regional TUC to ensure the maximum involvement of trade unions in the campaign, particularly in the work place
- community activity and music events can play a vital part in the campaign and create greater understanding and joint work with all the diverse community
- May Day events 6 weeks prior to 11 June European Elections should have Anti Racism as the main theme

### **Public Services**

It is acknowledged that there continues to be widespread support for our public services. For example, combating attacks on the NHS is fertile ground for involving trade unions and members of the general public. Similarly there is a need to engage with the

general public and unions to defend sub-post offices from closer. Sub-post offices which are frequently located in deprived urban areas and are often the only financial services available locally.

Trades Union Councils should:

- Trades Union Councils need to campaign to oppose cuts in NHS provision unless they can be justified on clinical grounds'
- redouble their efforts to encourage all health service branches to affiliate to their local Trades Union Councils
- work to ensure health workers are valued for the service they provide, and that attacks on jobs are opposed
- work with unions to recruit and organise health sector workers to join unions
- support calls for properly funded public services
- build links with other organisations campaigning to defend the health service including affiliating to "Keep Our NHS Public"
- join with the unions and the local public in opposing the closure of sub-post offices
- present the economic case for keeping sub-post offices open

### **Trades Union Council Activity in the Community**

Boosting affiliations should be a top priority for all Trades Union Councils. The activities of the Trades Union Councils need to be relevant to the concerns and issues facing unions and their branches. Trades Union Councils should:

- match this Programme of Work to the needs of union branches and the local community
- seek access to schools through local union branches
- work with others to establish courses for Trades Union Council officers
- seek to have an input into trade union rep training so that the role and value of Trades Union Councils can be explained
- encourage better participation and

representation of women, black and young members and press local unions to support this effort

- work with Community Networks to become the voice of trade unionism in the community
- review how they operate to ensure that new delegates find it as easy as possible to attend regularly and participate in their activities
- ensure that venues are chosen that are acceptable to all
- seek participation in appropriate public consultative and representative bodies
- arrange meetings with high profile speakers who can address topical issues. These could take the form of open meetings
- support relevant cultural events e.g. radical theatre and histories of the labour movement
- share best practice with other Trades Union Councils through email and websites
- develop links with the media
- engage on climate and recycling issues

To support Trades Union Councils implement the campaigning ideas outlined in this Programme of Work, the TUC General Council devotes £21,000 of the Development Fund. Grants of up to £300 are distributed by the TUC Regional Secretaries for activities developed in line with this programme. An application form is available from the TUC Regional Office. Trades Union Councils are encouraged to make joint bids for grants in order to fund collaborative projects.

County Associations of Trades Union Councils can also access the Development Grant to run campaigns with the specific goal of:

- establishing new Trades Union Councils
- revitalising existing Trades Union Councils
- boosting branch affiliations to Trades Union Councils

### **Manufacturing**

There is a general concern that jobs continue to be lost in manufacturing

through the effects of globalisation. Be it through direct competition or jobs being offshored to countries with lower wage costs. It should not however be seen as an inevitable process given Germany is currently the largest exporter of manufactured goods in the world despite relative high wages.

Trades Union Councils need to combat the myth that nothing can be done to defend employment in manufacturing. Measures to be taken largely by the Government include:

- the repeal of anti-trade union laws that hamper British workers to combat closures
- for employment rights to be introduced on par with those found in most western EU countries which currently makes cutting jobs in the UK an easy and cheap option
- measures to support greater research and development by employers in the UK
- the inclusion of such social issues as defending jobs in the process by which goods and services are procured from the private sector by the public sector
- greater provision to ensure that British workers were educated and skilled to levels that allowed us to compete with the most successful economies
- manufactures need to develop their lead in areas of green technologies

Furthermore, all those in the trade union movement should be pressing for the rights of those workers in the developing economies to be respected and that they should share more fully in their country's new found wealth.

### **Funding**

As part of their activity to rebuild Trades Union Councils campaign bids may also include applications to cover administrative costs, including travel costs associated with participation in wider TUC structures and organisation.

Those County Associations submitting bids should identify clear goals with measurable outcomes, such as boosting the number of

branches affiliating to Trades Union Councils or establishing new Trades Union Councils. Examples of how Development Funding was spent in 2007 – 2008 include:

**Trades Union Councils' Joint Consultative Committee**

- Croydon TUC – Defending public services
- Swindon and District TUC – H&S conference
- Merseyside CATUC – International Womens' Day 2008
- Swansea CTUC – Defending NHS services
- Wolverhampton, Bilston and District TUC Anti BNP literature
- Cambridge CATUC – launch of Huntingdon Trades Union Council
- Wear Valley and District TUC – Raising profile of TUC
- Bradford TUC – Banner Theatre performance

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