

WEST COUNTRY WORKERS

NEWS FROM THE
SOUTH WEST TUC
ISSUE 8 2019

Changing the world
of work for good

TUC South West

ON THE EDGE

A glorious coast doesn't
pay the bills



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Coastal workers need a new deal

The South West has a spectacular coastline, but behind the beautiful beaches, cliffs and bays lie some hard truths about poverty pay and hardship.

A recent BBC report found seaside residents earn £1,600 less than people inland.

The figures hit the South West particularly hard, as Plymouth's Sutton and Devonport MP Luke Pollard noted: "This research reveals the scale of the deprivation and inequality imposed on people in our coastal communities by almost a decade of austerity under the Conservatives.

"Our coast is one of Britain's greatest assets but the people who live here have been let down by a lack of investment and poor infrastructure.

"Labour will invest in better rail and bus links, faster and more reliable broadband, and we will tax holiday homes that sit empty for months on end to pay for public services that locals rely on all year round."

The research showed, for example, workers in Weston-super-Mare have

seen real-terms wages fall by around 25% since 2010.

And when the BBC interviewed 18-year-old Danny Hammond, who works as a waiter in a Cornish restaurant, he said: "I love Penzance but I'm also sick of it. I earn £6.30 an hour, which isn't great, and people older than me really struggle to pay the rent or the mortgage."

Weymouth and Portland in Dorset is one of the most deprived parts of the UK, with average weekly wages the lowest in the country according to ONS statistics.

More than four out of ten children there are living in poverty. Young people have few opportunities beyond the leisure sector with its seasonal jobs.

In October the House of Commons Library published new research on opportunities for children across England. This showed that South Dorset ranks bottom among 533 Parliamentary constituencies for social mobility – the likelihood that children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds will do well

as adults in terms of jobs, income and housing.

Philip Marfleet, organiser of Weymouth and Portland Action on Wages (WeyPAW), said: "We held a series of workshops at the local college to help young people understand their rights at work. There were some alarming stories from the students – like Kiernan from Portland, who is 18-years-old and was being paid £2.90 an hour to work in a local shop.



Phillip Marfleet, Organiser of Weymouth and Portland Action on Wages

New deal for working people



We need a new deal for working people, says South West TUC Regional Secretary Nigel Costley.

Everyone deserves to be paid and treated fairly at work. But in many workplaces the balance of power has shifted too far in favour of employers.

When workers join together, they win better wages, safer workplaces and a more powerful voice at work.

The TUC is calling for:

- » New rights so that workers can access the protection of a union in every workplace so that nobody has to face their employer alone.
- » Support for the self-employed – ban bogus self-employment
- » Ban zero-hours contracts
- » New investment so our schools, hospitals, councils and civil service can deliver the services we need
- » Bring back into public hands our railways, water and mail
- » Allow councils to make sure contractors provide decent working conditions or return to direct employment

Workers in Weston-super-Mare have seen real-terms wages fall by around 25% since 2010

Torbay continues to be the poor relation of the South West with the lowest weekly wages of £360 compared to the regional average of £438, according to the latest figures from the Office of National Statistics

"We have a serious problem with rogue employers – bosses who won't pay the National Minimum Wage, who don't provide contracts or holiday pay, or who simply withhold the full wages – that's wage theft. In a depressed economy with low incomes they think they can get away with it."

WeyPAW recently held a well-attended conference on the wages crisis, child poverty and ill-health. It believes action can make a difference and is pressing Dorset Council to take a lead. WeyPAW wants the council to ensure all its employees and all those on contracts issued by the council are paid the Minimum Wage.

WeyPAW has called on the council to organise sessions on rights at work in local schools and colleges,



Luke Pollard MP in front of Devonport Guildhall

and to provide employment surgeries at which workers facing problems with wages and conditions can get legal advice.

Philip Marfleet said: "We have an urgent problem. Young people leave South Dorset because the future looks bleak, with low wages and high living costs, especially for housing. Things must change – one reason why WeyPAW is launching a new campaign together with Dorset Trades Council. Poverty Pay – No Way! will take the issue of low pay to every union branch and into workplaces across the county."

The South West TUC recently met in Plymouth, where Luke Pollard said:

"The city saw significant regeneration under the last Labour government but under the current government the region doesn't get its fair share of funding. We have Tory MPs who vote for cuts rather than pressing for greater investment."



Portland and the spectacular Chesil Beach

Photo: Nigel Costley

Luke was passionate about the communities' determination to get things done even in the face of cuts and government indifference. He highlighted the social enterprise that runs the Guildhall as an example. But life for many in Devonport is tough.

"I met a woman here the other day with three jobs and still has to use a food bank to make ends meet", he said. It's examples like this that prove the need for the TUC's New Deal for Working People. ■

Weymouth and Portland Action on Wages conference



"I met a woman here the other day with three jobs and still has to use a food bank to make ends meet"

Universal Credit must go



Dee Whittington (left) with singer Eddi Reader

Tolpuddle resident Dee Whittington shares her experience of the government's brutal welfare system.

Dee retired early from her job as an NHS mental health nurse due to ill-health with a small occupational

pension. When the opportunity arose, she successfully applied to fill one of the cottages when it became vacant a few years ago. Since moving in, she has transformed the garden into a blaze of colour, bursting with fruit and veg.

As a charitable landlord, the rent at Tolpuddle remains in line with the local housing allowance which has been frozen since 2010. Unlike many private landlords who refuse to accept benefit claimants, the Trust provide affordable accommodation for retired trade unionists like Dee.

Despite having a complex range of medical conditions that limit her ability to work, Dee took on a few trial shifts at the Puddletown general store to see if she was able to get back into work and give her something to do. She checked with the council who said it was okay as the £90 per month wage would not affect her rent support.

What they didn't tell her was that this change in income, however low, would trigger immediate

attempts to move her into the new bungled benefits system, Universal Credit. Dee suddenly suffered a sequence of cuts to the assistance she was previously receiving, and even a disputed claim that she owed over £1000 to the council! Dee's health deteriorated and after heart attacks and rushes to hospital she has had to give up hopes of working.

The TUC has found that transferring from the old system to Universal Credit is complex with many claimants facing huge problems getting it right. A lot of people have also fallen into debt and hardship as the transition can leave claimants waiting weeks before receiving the money they are owed.

Dee's struggles continued. Her multiple health conditions meant she received Personal Independence Payment, but a new assessment ruled she was no longer entitled to it despite her worsening health. Dee appealed this decision and won. She now gets £50 a week plus her small NHS pension of £130 a week to pay for everything.

Nigel Costley South West TUC Regional Secretary said: "Universal Credit has been a complete disaster for low-income workers already – and it's only going to get worse. We should be ashamed of a government that treat people like Dee this way. The system should be scrapped as soon as possible." ■

A lot of people have faced existing benefits being stopped before they've transferred to the new system

Unite helps bus drivers take healthy living in their stride

by Keith Hatch

Unite members at First Somerset and Avon in Weston-super-Mare are being encouraged to take a lunchtime stroll along the seafront thanks to a new partnership organised by the union.

Unite Regional Learning Organiser Tazim Ladhu has linked up with Strollers, a walking group run by community volunteer Mike Jones, to offer drivers the chance to stretch their legs and improve their health.

The new initiative was launched in October as part of a packed Health and Wellbeing day at the First offices in Weston.

The union has negotiated with managers the use of a meeting room once a week to be turned into a union learning centre. Every Wednesday new Unite Union Learning Rep Kath Williams uses the office to promote workplace learning and encourage courses and activities.

Tazim had been discussing the idea of a lunchtime walking group

for union members with Mike for a while after reading his story in a local paper. She has been busy building up a partnership between the union, Strollers and North Somerset Council's Public Health Walks.

Mike set up the group after his wife passed away and he began to re-evaluate his own health. He was 27 stone and found walking to the local health centre or shops a struggle.

The health benefits of walking are well known, and Mike was soon shedding the pounds – he has lost seven stone since he started. Mike felt that walking not only improved his physical health but also being outside and active also improved his mental health.

Mike is really happy about the partnership with Tazim and Unite. "I do this as a volunteer, and get a lot of satisfaction talking to people and seeing them improve their health and confidence – I'm really looking forward to seeing how this new group develops."

Mike Jones getting his group of Strollers ready for a walk along Weston sea front



Teachers fighting for their schools



The General Election will be crucial for the future of education, according to the NEU's new regional secretary.

Hannah Packham took over from Andy Woolley in the summer and already finds herself in the midst of an education crisis, with 83% of schools facing cuts. To make matters worse, a recent YouGov poll showed 53% per cent of teachers are considering leaving the profession and the Department for Education's (DFE) own statistics show teachers are quitting at an alarming rate with almost a third (32.3%) leaving within five years of qualifying – a record high.

The major study led by the University College London found that around two in five teachers usually work in the evening and many give up their free time at the weekend to work.

A quarter of teachers in England work more than 60 hours per week during term time.

"Three quarters of new teachers are women", says Hannah. "They don't want to work 60-hour weeks. How on earth are people expected to have a family?"



Hannah Packham, the new NEU South West Regional Secretary

"The system is flawed with performance measured against SATs exams and school league tables. Assessment should support learning – learning should not be driven by assessment."

Hannah says teachers want to support pupils' growth towards ethically responsible membership of society, providing them with the knowledge and skills needed for life.

She recognises the focus on testing leaves teachers and children frustrated and she is aware of the rise in children with mental health

problems, believing "children are drilled in exam factories".

The South West has a large number of academy schools leaving a fragmented system.

"Academies can be run by big national chains with schools from Skegness to Penzance," Hannah says. "In some, the chief officer is paid an extortionate salary with financial irregularities discovered in a few.

"It is a challenge to hold these chains to account as academies sit outside of local authority democratic accountability; while we continue to campaign against schools being forced to academise, we are building union rep committee structures to negotiate with trust boards."

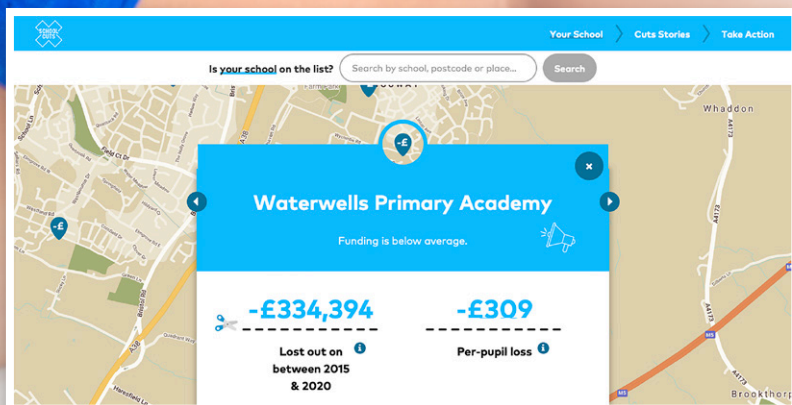
The financial squeeze on school funding has been "horrifying" said Hannah, who recognises the needs of schools in areas of deprivation as well as pressures on rural schools across the region.

"The higher the level of needs of pupils the greater the cuts have been. The DFE's own figures show that the schools in top free school meal band will lose between £343 and £427 per pupil, while those in the lowest band will lose between £80 and £33 per pupil.

"83% of schools are facing cuts despite recent announcement of more money from the government."

To find out more go to:
www.schoolcuts.org.uk ■

A quarter of teachers in England work more than 60 hours per week during term time



You just can't Rayner in

by Nigel Costley



The Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival was a busy one for Angela Rayner.

Labour's shadow education secretary came for the weekend, joining a panel session to discuss arts education on the Friday, facing an in-depth conversation with Joanne Kaye, UNISON's South West regional secretary on the Saturday, and speaking from the main stage on the Sunday.

And she loved every minute.

"I really enjoyed it," she told *West Country Workers*. "People were absolutely adorable. I loved the messages of standing up to authority and being able to make a difference for your community no matter how hard it is. I was really energised by the whole Tolpuddle experience."

She returned to the region in the autumn, where a visit to Cornwall gave the 'city girl' an insight into the challenges of the West Country.

"It was really green," she said. "It was proper country air – not like Manchester! The people were really

nice. Everyone says 'Hi!' and it was nice to see so many tiny shops, each with their own identity."

The former UNISON official knows the trade union movement well and she credits it with giving her the education and confidence to pursue a role in politics. Tipped as a future leader of the Labour Party, Angela has come a long way from leaving school early as a teenage single mother from a very deprived community in Manchester.

"For a long time I felt embarrassed about my background – I felt I'd done something wrong," she admitted. "But I learnt, especially through the trade union movement, that disadvantage and inequality were the reasons I was born into the circumstances I was."

"My mum had severe mental health problems and couldn't read or write so I went to school not being 'school-ready'. I fell behind very quickly. My mum couldn't help me, my dad was out doing his own thing. I wasn't nourished in an educational way."

Angela had the benefits of her local Sure Start centre, a key initiative under the last Labour government to help working class families, giving children a better start in life. She got a job as a home care worker and was soon involved in the union.

"I left school with no qualifications and was pregnant," she said. "The way I learnt to be a good mum was through the Sure Start programme

and I went back through adult education with unionlearn. Helping working class people get on in life became a passion of mine."

After her time as a UNISON official she was persuaded to stand for Labour.

"Unions were fed up that people from a working class background were not getting selected and Labour seemed to be drifting away from its trade union roots," she said.

Unions trained her and gave her encouragement to stand. She was elected in 2015 and was soon seen as a rising star.

Under Jeremy Corbyn she became a shadow whip, shadow pensions minister and is now shadow education minister – an appointment that shocked some people given she'd left school early and didn't go through university.

Angela turns that on its head, believing her experience gives her an insight and appreciation of the struggle faced by so many working class families. It's one reason she is passionate to secure an education service free from tuition fees and other barriers.

"I met the Russell Group of top universities," she said. "As I hadn't been to university it was a baptism of fire. I had to get their respect."



"What really excites me is that Labour will fundamentally change the economy of the country"

But how does she get on with the public school- educated MPs on the benches opposite?

"Some are frightened to death," she smiled. "When they go posh, I go 'Manc', they don't understand me, it kinda intimidates them.

"In my time I've gone through four education secretaries. I'm now confident in my skin - I know my bacon. Working class people, especially women, think people are more intellectually sound than us so we over analyse and over research things because we don't want to let people down.

"My biggest fear is letting my constituents and my class down. People with an accent aren't stupid."

The climate emergency, automation and whatever happens with Brexit means that many adults now in work will need to retrain and maybe change careers. Angela believes they must have the advice and support needed and open access to learning opportunities to equip them for the future.

She agrees with her education minister Gordon Ramsden who described the current adult skills offer as more like a maze than a route map.

"We have to have a revolution in skills," she said. "What really excites me is that Labour will fundamentally change the economy of the country.

We will transform our infrastructure, re-industrialise our brown field sites. The state has to invest in the green jobs as the private sector won't do it."

She knows from her personal story the value of trade union education and learning.

"Unionlearn and trade union education was how I got educated," she said. "Trade unions need good employers. An employer who has a trade union will have a better workforce, better terms and conditions, good health and wellbeing. Trade unions for me have an absolutely crucial role."

She also recognises the contribution made by teachers to protect their schools and colleges from some of the most savage cuts ever seen to our education provision. The recent announcements of more cash for schools carries little weight.

Angela welcomes the School Cuts campaign that exposes the level of per pupil funding in every school so people can see how reduced funding has impacted on local education.

"The School Cuts campaign has been absolutely crucial," she said. "The coalition between teachers and head teachers, the parents and community activists coming together to show what the government was saying was not true.

"The School Cuts campaign has really shone a light on what this government has been trying to say and its spin and untruths.

"The best jobs will be in the green revolution but it will have to be led by investment by the state"

"If you're a parent you've seen the cuts, head teachers having to ask for money, you've seen the subjects decreasing, you've seen schools closing early on Friday, you've seen the teaching assistants leaving because they've had to cut back.

"The Government has been saying one thing but on the ground it's different and the School Cuts campaign has really exposed it."

The idea of a new National Education Service offers a radical vision for free access at all levels, from cradle to grave.

"Education is not something done to you at a particular point in your life but as something for society," she said. "We know the economy of the future will be different, people need to be resilient, need to change what work they do.

"They will not be in one industry all their lives, we have got to prepare people for that.

"If we carry on as we are we're just managing decline. The best jobs will be in the green revolution but it will have to be led by investment by the state."

Angela can be sure of another great time when she returns to Tolpuddle.

Nigel Costley talking to Angela at Tolpuddle



Union charts the way to go green at work



Ben Caile

For someone whose job is charting the oceans, asking a few questions in your workplace might appear a relatively simple task, writes **Tim Lezard.**

And so it proved for Prospect rep Ben Caile, who has inspired a new generation of union activists at the UK Hydrographic Office in Taunton.

"I became involved about five years ago," he says. "The branch was lots of older guys – a stereotypical view of trade unions, I suppose – but now the demographic is much younger and we have an equal gender split."

As civil servants, UKHO employees are bound by the government's pay structures, so Ben and his colleagues have found different issues to campaign about.

"With pay off the agenda, it's forced us to highlight the other things trade unions do in the workplace – we've done lots of work around the menopause, the environment and climate change," he says.

The union's also taken a proactive stance on mental health issues, putting together a working group comprising union members, non-members and management to change the culture in the workplace.

The UKHO now organises mental health training for employees, has a well-being room available ("for staff when they're having a period of crisis," explains Ben) and, importantly, has increased the understanding of mental health and mental health issues.

"The tone of conversation around mental health has changed completely in the last three or four years," he says. "It's become a much more open conversation

in the office, people recognise it's an issue. In the beginning we were surprised at how many people had mental health issues, but we recognised it was good to share these issues because it helps us to address them."

Another way Ben has helped to change culture at work is through his role as a green rep, where as well as pushing for more recycling and energy conservation, he's active in a climate action group across the business.

"It allows us to feed back ideas to management so they can take them forward. These ideas include not only how we as a business can become greener, but how our

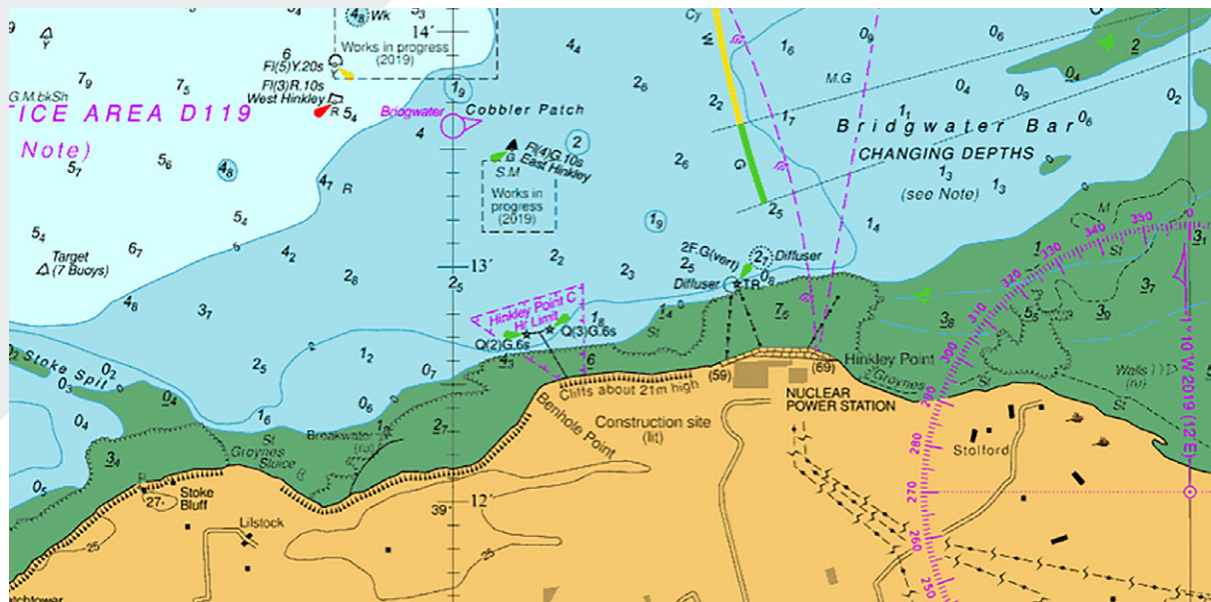
products and data could be used to support green initiatives", he says.

He says his life has changed for the better since he became a rep, not only because of the career development opportunities his situation affords him, but because it's expanded his political horizon.

"I've been to TUC Congress, which has opened my eyes to the wider trade union movement and what we do, especially in international development, and the issues other trade unions are facing," he says.

"I've been to my own union's conference too, and it's great for networking, speaking to others and find out what's going on in the world beyond these four walls." ■

"The tone of conversation around mental health has changed completely in the last three or four years."



Student climate strikers

Student climate strikers have highlighted the urgency to act to save the planet from catastrophic impacts.

The environment has become a central issue in political debate and unions will be key to protecting and helping workers tackle the changes that are needed.

Tom Youngman, PCS rep at the Bristol office of the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs, decided to invite school strikers into his office to talk to staff.

Tom Youngman said: "We thought this would be a great opportunity to learn from the young people who could explain to us why they've been taking action, what they're demanding and how it has felt to take a stand."

As demonstrators gathered around the corner on Bristol's College Green ahead of the midday protest, Aden Harns aged 14 and

Holly Walton aged 15 explained why they had walked out of school to protest against government inaction to protect the environment.

The students spoke of the reaction of parents and teachers to their determination to act.

"There was initial reluctance to support us," said Aden. "But since then the teachers have been very positive."

Holly agreed: "My teachers are being very supportive, but they can't say they are."

The young students were also given the chance to speak directly to members of the government's climate change team in the Environment Agency. In turn, the civil servants welcomed how the school strikes had changed public and governmental attitudes, and how the importance of their work had risen due to them.



Both displayed a deep understanding of the issues involved and how it would be their generation left to deal with environmental damage.

"Children need to be more informed" said Holly.

"To cut carbon emissions we need to be relentless" said Aden. ■

"There was initial reluctance to support us," said Aden. "But since then the teachers have been very positive."



Going green at Tolpuddle

by **Tom De Wit**, Manager of the Tolpuddle Martyrs' Museum



Our environmental performance at Tolpuddle has been a priority for some time.

This is in line with the TUC policy on A Just Transition to a Greener, Fairer Economy. This year, with heightened awareness of the environment and climate change in politics and society, we are pleased that we can demonstrate good practice and have been developing this for some years.

Plastic

We have been paying particular attention to plastic reduction. We have eliminated plastic drinks containers from the shop and have become a Refill Station which lets people find local places on their Smartphone where they can fill up with tap water for free. Alongside

this we have introduced our own re-usable water bottles

Greener Festival

The festival this year was the greenest ever. We laid pipes to make additional water refill stations. We introduced re-usable plastic goblets at the bar. We try to recycle all our waste. Non-meat food waste, wooden cutlery and paper plates is composted on site – assisted by a new rotary-drum composter. The great village breakfasts had a price-reduction if customers brought their own plate and cutlery.

Power

We are producing more electricity on site than is used at the festival. Since the solar-PV panels were installed just under four years ago, we have generated over 40 Mwh of electricity. What we haven't used has gone back into the grid, earning £5,100 from the export tariff and making a saving of carbon emissions of 21 tonnes of CO₂. This is approximately equivalent to the emissions of an average family car over five years.

Campaigning

The festival is full of great music and political debate. This year the environment featured strongly with discussions over transforming industry, the future of food production and the need for a Green New Deal. The festival heard about Labour's plans for a Green Industrial Revolution. It plans to invest in



energy-efficient and solar-powered homes, expand onshore and offshore wind, accelerate the introduction of electric vehicles and instigate a huge programme of tree planting and habitat restoration. ■

Non-meat food waste, wooden cutlery and paper plates is composted on site – assisted by a new rotary-drum composter



Solar panels at Tolpuddle have saved 21 tonnes of CO₂

Our culture is rich but most performers aren't

by Tim Lezard



© Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

The South West TUC has launched a manifesto calling for increased funding and proper advocacy for the creative, heritage and cultural industries.

The report details where proper investment and support has boosted the regional economy and labour market – for every £1 of salary paid by the arts and creative industries, an additional £2.01 is put back into the economy – as well as reviving towns and cities, and demands proper pay and decent working conditions for those in the industry.

Professional artists, musicians, writers and cultural workers are too often being asked to work for free, or for a low fixed rate that takes them well below the national minimum wage.

Take singer-songwriter Emily Capell (below), for example. The 23-year-old, who's recently toured with The Selecter and is playing next

year's Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival, explained how hard it is to make money when starting out as a musician.

Whilst stopping short of accusing people of exploiting her, she said: "I had a million jobs to keep me going. I had a residency at the Dublin Castle in Camden, so I would go there, play a gig, drive home for 1.30am, my alarm would go at 5am so I could start work as a baker. I'd have to put a hairnet on and when you have a beehive it's an absolute nightmare. It was horrendous. I did that for two years.

"I've taught guitar, singing, just simple shop work and temp work. You don't get paid to work as a musician. You either earn a fortune or you earn absolutely nothing.

"You have to work really hard. A lot of people who work in the creative industry have parents who are funding them. I know people that

"I know musicians who have been shafted. It's always been important to be part of the union."

have been shafted. It's always been important to be part of the union."

TUC Regional Secretary for the South West Nigel Costley said: "We all benefit from a thriving arts and cultural sector. These industries greatly enrich the region and are major players in the south west economy. But the sector is fragile and persistently under-resourced."

"It's time the government and local authorities recognise the many advantages access to well-funded arts education and programmes can

have for our children and communities."

"Government bodies and private investors in the arts must also make good employment standards for every worker a core requirement of their funding.

"Like any profession, creative workers deserves a proper wage, decent working conditions and fair treatment."

You can download the manifesto at www.tuc.org.uk/reports/cultural-manifesto ■



High street make-over

Dorchester in the autumn closed its main street to traffic and welcomed people to visit its historic attractions for free.

The High Street became a blank canvas for artists to paint a massive chalk picture of a trade union banner. People joined in with the community spirit of the day and

helped draw the image of the Tolpuddle Martyrs under the tree and symbols to mark the anniversary of the Peterloo Massacre.

The artist was Sarah Hough and the event was organised by Mary-Anne Edwards and Kate Hebditch for Dorchester Town Council Heritage Committee.



Apprenticeship Essentials

Download unionlearn's new resource today!

Unionlearn has launched Apprenticeship Essentials, a brand-new all-in-one resource aimed at supporting apprentices. The app features guidance, interactive tools, bite-sized learning, job search and more.

Unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan said: "Once downloaded you will be able to browse through guidance that covers everything from apprenticeship basics to entering the world of work and employment rights."



"The app also highlights the key role trade unions can play in supporting apprentices in workplaces."

To download the app go to the unionlearn website or simply search for "Apprenticeship Essentials" in your app store.

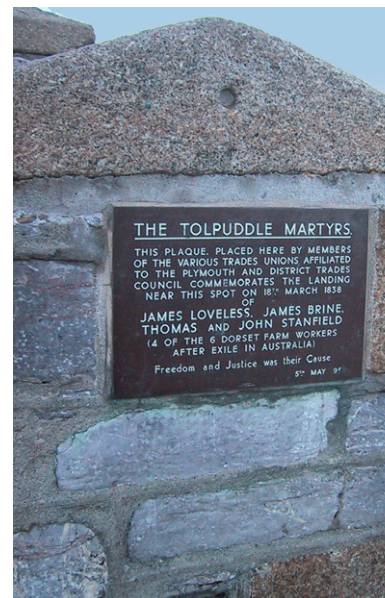
www.unionlearn.org.uk/apprenticeship_essentials ■

New plaque

The South West TUC is working with Plymouth City Council to install a new plaque to mark the homecoming of the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

In 1834 six Dorset farm workers were sentenced to seven years' transportation for taking an oath to form a trade union. After a massive outcry across the country and legal arguments against the punishment, the government backed-down.

Four of the Martyrs were greeted at the Mayflower Steps in Plymouth on 18 March 1838. Their struggle and the protest campaign secured the right of working people to join together in trade unions. It is hoped the plaque will be installed in time to be unveiled on 18 March 2020. ■



The existing Plymouth plaque

Dying to Work

The number of West Country organisations signing up to the TUC's Dying to Work Charter is growing rapidly. Gloucester, Gloucestershire and Bristol councils are soon to be joined by Plymouth and Cornwall. Western Power has taken the pledge, as has Petroc College and Plymouth Living Well. They promise to support workers who face a terminal illness. www.dyingtowork.co.uk



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