

South West TUC Annual Conference, March 15th 2025: Trades Councils' Report



Regional Trades Councils' Annual Meeting, GWRSA Club, Bridgwater, Saturday, February 22nd

This was the best-attended annual meeting I can remember, with 42 delegates from 17 trades councils, and a total attendance of 49. My thanks to Hannah David, Ines Lage and Tanya Parker for their contributions to the success of the day. We had excellent guest speakers: Sharon Battishill, Unite, Dave Roberts, FBU and Rachel Beaney, PCS. Richard Capps, Weston & Noth Somerset Trades Council, was elected to fill the one vacant trades councils' 'top-up' place on the Regional TUC. A local small business, Mark Catering Services, provided a very good buffet lunch, and, considering that the venue, the GWRSA Club, is next to Bridgwater Rail Station, the fact that the club only charges £25 for a full-day booking should mean that it is much better used by trades unions for their meetings!

The photo below shows my presentation of a recently-published book on trades councils' history, by Michael and Josh Bor, to John Bampfylde.



John Bampfylde has, for over 50 years, been central to just about each and every trade union, socialist, anti-fascist, anti-poll tax and environmental campaign in his home city of Bath. It was high time that our movement honoured his unique contribution, and I was proud make the presentation. A true Somerset working-class hero!



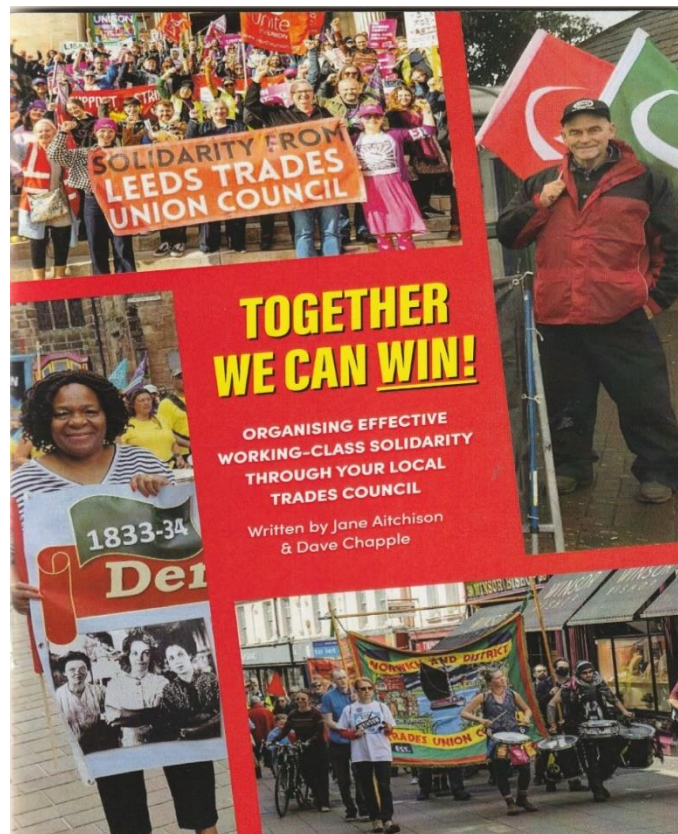
Old Market, Bristol, summer 2024, the huge anti-fascist protest against the threat to an Immigration Service Solicitors

Introduction

- Carl Roper has taken over from Kevin Rowan—who has retired— as the TUC General Council’s officer for trades councils. Carl has promised to try and ensure that one of my key demands at the TUC JCC—that all affiliated union, and TUC education, reps’ courses have significant time to promote trades councils. The 2023 trades councils’ motion to TUC Congress on this matter, moved by Taunton’s Liz Payne Ahmadi and carried unanimously, could be, if implemented, be the start of a significant revival in our fortunes. Here is the text:
- **Motion: National trade union support for trades councils’ solidarity work: “Conference believes that solidarity with workers taking strike action is a fundamental principle of the Trade Union movement. Therefore, Conference applauds all the local Trades Councils who have been working so hard, during 2023, to deliver picket line solidarity with strikers from many different Trade Unions (both TUC affiliated and non-affiliated). However, the ability to show solidarity and offer picket line support is limited by less-than- ideal communications between unions and Trades Councils. Often Trades Councils are the last to know about disputes, strikes and picket lines in their areas. This makes coordinating public support and inter-union solidarity more difficult than it should be. Conference believes that information is key to building relationships between Trades Councils and unions and their branches. We are, however, concerned that many Trades Councils do not**

have information about their local union branches. Conference urges the TUC General Council to encourage all affiliated Trade Unions to: 1. Ensure that all their media and communications officers, or General Secretaries, have up to date contact details for all UK (and as appropriate Republic of Ireland) Trades Councils. 2. Ensure, as a matter of routine, that relevant information, including media releases, are sent to all Trades Councils. 3. In particular, during disputes, whether local, regional or national, ensure that trades councils are sent up to date information on strike dates and times, picket lines, how negotiations, if any, are proceedings, and, last but not least, the outcomes of these disputes. Conference also asks the general council to write to all affiliated unions, requesting them to ensure that their regional (or in smaller unions national) officers are provided with the contact details of trades council secretaries in their region, and that these officers send the names of the relevant branches of their union for each trades' council. If trades councils are to fully deliver their promise of workers solidarity, the TUC and TUC-affiliated unions should provide the information and support that is necessary."

- **Building your trades council, best practice, one: Jane Aitchison, Leeds TUC** Secretary, and I wrote and published the first-ever pamphlet on promoting trades councils. This has the backing of the TUC and the South West TUC and deserves to be in the letter boxes or computer in-boxes of EVERY trade union rep, Branch Officer, regional organiser or regional officer, as well, as -and I am taking this for granted- every trades' council delegate. The pamphlets do not cost anything, other than the printing costs. Bridgwater and Mendip TUCs have combined their 2024 TUC Development Fund grants to print £600 worth. Can we all try and maximise the use of this organising and educational pamphlet please?



Jane Aitchison and Dave Chapple's new trades councils' pamphlet, supported by the TUC and the South West TUC

Building your trades council: best practice two: Tanbir Siddique, Cheltenham and District Secretary, has developed a systematic approach to winning affiliations from branches. Among his innovations is this standard letter which, using TUC national and regional information, he sends out to EVERY TUC-affiliated union/union branch that might have members who either work or in the area. Please consider using this letter for your own council's plans to increase affiliations. If you don't have a plan, can I suggest you consider one?

Dear ***

I hope you're well. We'd like to formally request for affiliation and delegation invitations to be duly considered for this year. We're looking to help promote effective solidarity in disputes and joint campaigns. We'd like to ask that if your union/union branch has members who live or work in the area then would you consider affiliating and selecting delegates to Cheltenham and District Trades council.

You can affiliate on the basis of a proportionate part of your membership where your branch covers a wider area than that of our Trades Union Council. Cheltenham and District Trades Council covers members living and/or working in Cheltenham, Tewkesbury, and the Cotswolds (excluding Tetbury, Cirencester and Lechlade).

By affiliating, your activists have the opportunity to work with other trade unionists in their community to coordinate campaigns and actions that advance the interests of workers. It will provide access to resources and knowledge, strengthen your union's presence, and build solidarity with other trade unionists, and the collective power of other members of the Trades Council, which can help raise awareness of issues affecting workers in your community.

Please find attached our affiliation form. If you're happy to affiliate, please complete with details of your secretary and their contact details, and name(s) of the selected delegate(s) along with their contact details. Any changes can be notified at a later date. The affiliation fee is 10p per member with a minimum fee of £10 and branches pay an annual fee that is based on their branch membership; however, this rule is not rigid as some branches/unions are restricted by the amount they can pay by their rules. You are entitled to one delegate for 50 branch members or under, two delegates for 51 to 200 branch members and three delegates for 201 to 500 branch members, then an extra delegate per 200 members to a maximum of eight.

Our monthly meetings alternate between in person and online. Our Annual General Meeting is held in March and we request that you to complete affiliation before then so that your delegates can participate in this. We would like members to participate so that we can help and support them. Perhaps, an email and/or text to reps and members in Gloucestershire asking if they'd be interested in getting involved could be sent with something like below:

'Cheltenham and District Trades Council (covering Cheltenham, Tewkesbury, and the Cotswolds excluding Tetbury, Cirencester and Lechlade) are seeking affiliation to help promote effective solidarity in disputes and joint campaigns. They have asked if members who live and/or work in the area would consider becoming delegates to trades council meetings.'

Could we also request a spot to talk about our trades' council at any forthcoming branch AGMs? We hope that we can look forward to your support and participation."

An ageing activists' base? I think the average age of a trade union rep is over 50 and still rising. The average age of a trades' council delegate, working and non-working, is almost certainly higher. Of course, this is a problem, but is the advancing age question restricted to the trade union movement? In Somerset, at least, most public-minded, civic orientated organisations struggle with new young recruits. There is something radically wrong with our society that has managed to raise millions of young people- perhaps a majority- who do not, or do not know how to-engage with society at all! As we can continue to discuss the crisis in our movement- will trades councils exist in 10 years' time? Please, you wonderful trades council officers of a certain age, do not beat yourselves up for continuing to sustain our solidarity cause.

Torbay and Swindon: I know I (and the South West TUC) had ambitions to assist with this vital matter last year, but can 2025 be the year when Swindon and Torbay/South Devon TUCs get re-established please? I know that, in the case of Torbay, a well-attended anti-far-right protest was organised by local trades unionists, so, let's get these trades councils up and running!

Reports from the South West's nineteen trades councils and two County Associations

1. Bath

There has been an increase in delegates attending this year, which is promising. Mike Carley, Bath University UCU, continues as secretary. Zarría Philips continued to represent Bath TUC on the SW TUC, and is also Bath TUC treasurer. Zarría was honoured by her Unite Community Branch for her long service as Branch Secretary, an event which I attended.

I have also recently begun a tape-recording project with John Bamfylde, veteran working-class Bathonian, socialist, trades unionist and trades council officer, investigating both John's memories- which include the British Army in Cyprus and Northern Ireland; SOGAT Convenor at Pitman Press; and membership of Bath International Socialists/Socialist Workers Party. - and the Bath TUC archive at Bath University.

Dave Chapple, TUC Joint Consultative Committee/ JCC Rep

2. Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole:

All change at this TUC! Much to everyone's surprise, including, I suspect, his own, the BCP TUC Chair, former NPC National Officer, then UNISON Officer and Tolpuddle Martyr's Festival stalwart Neil Duncan-Jordan, was elected Labour MP for Poole in the General Election by a margin of 28 votes! Neil has already shown he is not afraid to challenge his own Government when he thinks this is necessary. Best of luck Neil! Gareth Drinkwater, NHS worker and UNISON Branch Officer, has stood down as secretary, and his replacement is Joanne Oldale.

Welcome Joanne! For the past five years at least, this trades council has been represented at the South West TUC by Unite the Union delegate Alan Daniels, without whom, to be honest, this huge conurbation would have been totally disconnected with both the South West TIUC and its trades councils. Thanks Alan!



Neil Duncan-Jordan, centre, at a Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole International Workers' Memorial Day event, 2021
I thought a South West Trades Council chair being elected an MP was worth a second photo!



Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole TUC anti-fascist protest, Summer 2024.

3. Bridgwater and District

Although fewer delegates and supporters attended our 12 monthly meetings, down to 16 from 23 in 2023, we have had another year of sustained and, on the whole, successful campaigns, discussions, reports, events and solidarity. Our union affiliations were also down,

45 down to 43, from 20 different unions. But, given the problems that many UNION regional committees, and UNION branches have, ie:

- Achieving regular branch and committee meetings that are quorate
 - Overloading new comers with too many positions, leading to burn out
 - New activists often being unaware, from their own union training, what trades councils are and why they are important, because trades councils are often invisible, missing altogether from trade union and TUC education;
- It is no wonder that, nationally, despite excellent support from the South West TUC, we are still at the back of the queue for the TUC Bus!



Dave Chapple, Secretary, and Judith Desbonne, Chair, present Unite Regional Secretary Stev Preddy with the History of Betteshanger Colliery, Kent, after he spoke at the January 2025 AGM. Photo Andrew Mootoo

Bridgwater & District TUC continues to punch way above reasonable current expectations on what a small town-based local TUC can achieve. However, because most of our affiliates do not send delegates to our meetings, we remain stuck in that secondary role of being, in the main, a trade union support group, rather than, what a trades council should be, the democratic voice of elected representatives of 20,000 or 30,000 local trades union members.

In 2025 we are experimenting with six extra, but less formal meetings/events/gatherings in the GWRSA/Railway Club. These would be called "Nights at the Shack," and, would aim at attracting trades unionists and others to become closer to us, either as full delegates or regular supporters. Ideas include having a trade union, historical/educational, and/or campaign speakers; quiz nights; a musician or other entertainer, followed, usually, by a discussion. **Dave Chapple, CWU, Secretary**

4. Bristol



Bristol TUC delegates with their banner, including secretary Sheila Caffrey, at the left corner of the banner

Bristol TUC continues to play an active role across Bristol and South Gloucestershire in supporting picket lines, events, rallies and demos. Our banner or representatives have shared solidarity and support at about 40 union events ranging from striking Uber drivers to Port Talbot steel workers. We've spoken at several local Palestine demos, making the clear link for campaigns to be rooted in trade unions, and we were proud to be part of the movement that forced Bristol City Council to agree to divest from arms companies.

We've joined picket lines for ASLEF, GMB and the NEU's local strikes at Bristol and South Gloucestershire schools, the Hospital Education Service, as well as the national sixth form college strike. In the summer, we were at counter-demos against the far-right in Bristol and Taunton, as well as delivering a well-received speech calling for workers unity, focussing on jobs, homes and services, not racism.

Our banner has also been held high at Bristol Pride, Tolpuddle, and at lobbies organised by our South Gloucestershire-affiliated unions, lobbying over threatened cuts to jobs and services, and the FBU's successful lobby that prevented mass job cuts. We've supported local campaign stalls at ASDA ran by the GMB, and against fuel poverty organised by the UNITE the Union Community, as well as hosting our own general election hustings, anti-cuts meetings and events for Workers Memorial Day and May Day.

We have retained meeting attendance at 15-20 on average, as well as had a larger January public meeting against cuts to council services, which saw just under 50 attendees. We have regular attendance from ASLEF, NEU, NUJ, PCS, USDAW, UCU and several UNISON and UNITE branches. We also supported an event with Artists' Union England members and have affiliations and engagement with branches in the CWU, EQUITY, FBU, GMB and RMT. **Sheila Caffrey, NEU, Secretary**

5.Cheltenham and District



Cheltenham and District TUC's 2024 collage-nice one!

2024 started with 5,000 participating in the TUC demonstration against the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 anti-union legislation, on Saturday 27th January in Cheltenham from 12 noon in Montpellier Gardens marching through the town centre to Pittville Park.

The march and rally also commemorated the 40th anniversary of the GCHQ trade union ban. The event was organised by PCS and supported by the TUC, trades councils and community organisations. Our trades council were actively involved in the campaign to abolish the ban which was successful in 1997.

In February, our full council meetings moved to a hybrid room at Friends Meeting House, Cheltenham, to accommodate participation for delegates who have been unable to make physical meetings. Our meeting speakers included Rob Kitley of Aslef in March. Our ex-president, John Hurley, who was due to speak sadly died suddenly in April. Former president

and secretary, Quinn Tallon, introduced A Chronology of Workers Movements in Cheltenham co-written by Mike Grindley and his experience whilst being active in the trades' council in memory of John.

In April, we started an e-petition on Gloucestershire County Council's website calling on them not to issue work notices. After lobbying councillors, on 22nd May, the Labour Group proposed a motion that the Council as an employer should not use 'Minimum Service Levels' MSL powers during strike action by their employees. Unfortunately, Conservative councillors defeated the motion. Labour and Liberal- Democrat councillors voted for the motion. Greens were split, with four in favour and one (who has just defected from Conservative) voting against.

We organised two hustings for the general election. On 26th June in Tewkesbury Town Hall, with Cameron Thomas, Cate Cody and David Edgar, attended by 25 people. On 27th June in Friends Meeting House with Max Wilkinson, Daniel Wilson, Lara Chaplin, Daud McDonald and Tim Harman (substituting for Alex Chalk), attended by 40 people.

We also organised a street stall for International Workers Memorial Day in April and attended the May Day march and rally in Stroud. **Tanbir Siddique, Unite, Secretary**

6.Cornwall

Given the times we're living in, with no political representation for the working class and trade unions failing lamentably to pick up the slack, Cornwall TUC is doing OK, in my opinion. The triumvirate of officers who steered the ship through 2024 has just been re-elected and another activist is now vice-president.

In recent months we have had speakers from Labour for a Green New Deal, Troublemakers at Work and National Shop Stewards Network. We have affiliated to the latter two organisations.

Our last meeting resolved to take up the burning issue of cuts at Cornwall Council. We have made contact with the three recognised local government unions and hope to stimulate debate among members and the wider workforce with a leaflet calling for a needs-budget.

We have an eye-catching banner which was last seen (I think) supporting GMB workers at Asda in Penryn. We are part of the Safe Sick Pay Campaign, which aims to have proper sick pay included in the Employment Rights Bill when it finally emerges from its mauling by big business.

Cornwall TUC's Achilles Heel is, of course, small meetings which are primarily made up of retired workers, with active workers in the minority. Retired activists are great because they have the time to do the work but there needs to be a balance and at the moment there is an imbalance.

We know our frequent mailings reach many more union branches than are present at CTUC meetings. We're either out-of-touch with what union members in Cornwall are concerned about or the union branches themselves are barely functioning, it's hard to say.

Cornwall TUC will be at the South West TUC Annual Conference in Croyde Bay on March 14, aiming to get the National Shop Stewards' Network/NSSN model motion on the Employment Rights Bill passed. The class war goes on. **Rob Rooney, Unite, Chair**

7. Dorset

During 2024 Dorset TUC had 16 affiliated branches from 13 different unions. Monthly meeting attendance averaged 9 delegates with numbers currently increasing.

Throughout 2024 our developing strategy was to challenge the political agenda by campaigning directly to Dorset's community about years of economic and social decline. We publicised local Tory councillors' failure to persuade their own government to stop massive council funding cuts. Dorset TUC's General Election campaign publicised the negative impact of (then) MP Richard Drax's voting record on workers in Dorset. Recently, we are aiming to work with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole TUC for a Dorset-wide meeting to alert MPs to our concerns about Dorset's declining economy and lobby on key issues: economy, jobs; access to health/care services; transport; housing; education.



One of several demonstrations in support of the Bibby Stockholm Barge refugee residents, summer 2024

To engage the community in discussions on political issues, Dorset TUC's Radical Film Group has screened the following: John Pilger's 'The War You Don't See'; 'Israelism'; 'Beyond Elections'; 'The Plan' (a trades union's response to the arms trade).

Our anti-racism campaigning focused on supporting refugees housed on the Bibby Stockholm, particularly when 200 of them protested outside the barge. All barge residents have now been re-housed outside Dorset and the barge has gone!

We also supported national and local counter-protests against racist and fascist demonstrations, including an aggressive far-right demonstration in Weymouth.

Dorset TUC supported the launch of Dorset's Palestine Solidarity Campaign and its subsequent activities, running a stall at an event celebrating Palestinian culture and organising a Bike Ride for Gaza with cyclists flying Palestinian flags riding from Dorchester to Weymouth.

On environmental issues, DTUC's open letter to government ministers expressed strong opposition to permission to build a polluting waste incinerator on Portland's Jurassic Coast.

We continue to support Stop Portland Waste Incinerator's campaign against the Labour government's failure to honour its clean energy election promises.

Jenny Lennon-Wood, PCS (ARMS), Secretary

8.Exeter and District

At the AGM in January the decision was made to "reboot and rebuild" Exeter and District TUC as an organisation. The main drive would be to reach out to unions that were not affiliated to the Council, and to make sure the trade union voice was heard within Exeter and surrounding areas.

We were successful in obtaining £300 from the TUC, and this has been used to have made a light weight banner and to purchase a table and chairs to enable us to have stalls at community events and street stalls. In June we had a stall at the Exeter Transform event at the St Davids Community Centre, where we were able to give out leaflets and speak to attendees about the role of Trades Union in the community. We have had a presence at events in Exeter by organisations such as the Renters Reform Forum and worked with Fuel Poverty Action group to raise the issue of ever-increasing fuel bills.



Exeter TUCs General Election hustings top table, with Rob Kitley, TUC Chair, at left, and their new 'street-stall' banner.

In July, with the forthcoming general election, we held a successful hustings meeting, with 3 of the 5 candidates attending. Many issues were debated including housing, fuel prices and planning within Exeter. A delegation also attended Tolpuddle.

In August, the council supported the Exeter Together Against Racism event: a member of our Executive spoke at the rally. We also supported other Trade Councils by attending demonstrations in Plymouth and Torquay. Various guests have attended our meetings which

have included Hannah Packham, Regional NEU Secretary; Dave Chapple, South West Trades Council Rep, and Sadie Fulton from South West TUC. One of our aims for 2024 was to forge more relationships with unions and community groups and we feel that we have laid the foundations and will build on that progress in 2025. **Barbara Denning, Secretary**

9. Gloucester and District:

In 2024 Gloucester and District Trades Council's geographic area shrank with the setting up of the Stroud Trades Council and now covers the Gloucester Area and the Forest of Dean. It is encouraging to now have three functioning trades councils in Gloucestershire and together with Cheltenham and Stroud trades councils, we have constituted a county association, and intend to work together on campaigns and events.

Like many trades' councils, Gloucester has struggled to attract new delegates and with the loss of regular delegates to Stroud trades council, has lower attendances at meetings. We have had new affiliations from branches and regions in recent years, but these have not resulted in delegates being nominated, or attending meetings. It has also been difficult to get speakers for our meetings this year from trades unions.

On 1st October 2024, Gloucester TUC delegates supported the "Energy4All" protest outside the Ecotricity head office in Stroud, which was organised by Unite Community (photo below). Ecotricity does not formally recognise Unions and delegates met the South West Unite Energy Sector Officer at the event, who offered to provide any assistance possible to encourage Ecotricity workers to organise and join Unite. Ecotricity owner Dale Vince believes that he is a good employer, and that Unions are irrelevant to his business. As a result of pressure from UNITE, the management of Ecotricity have now agreed to meet with the South West Unite Energy Sector Officer. **Neil Armitage, Unite, Secretary**



Gloucester and District TUC's activists and banner at 'Ecotricity' protest

Supporting note from Dave Chapple: Neil Armitage, my good friend, and Gloucester's hard-working secretary, has a small team which keeps this TUC going, but the trade union branches in the area really need to step up and realise that they should promote the necessity of branch delegates to the workers' parliament of this great west country city, which has a great radical past: in 1923, Morgan Philips-Price Guardian Correspondent in Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution- came within a whisker of being elected the city's Communist MP!

10. Gloucestershire County Association

Gloucestershire Association of Trades Councils was reformed by Cheltenham and District, Gloucester and District and Stroud and District trades councils in June 2024 after becoming dysfunctional around 15 years ago. The initial meeting involved a discussion on the problems and challenges facing Gloucestershire trades councils, followed by practical ideas for mutual support and encouragement, followed by elections of officers, and agreeing geographical boundaries, delegation numbers and affiliation fees.

Interestingly, a bank account for the Association with Unity Trust Bank was identified by Quentin Tallon, former secretary and president of Cheltenham and District Trades Council which had not been dormant for over 30 years!

We have quarterly meetings and a hybrid format rotating across venues hosted by each trades' council. We have received regular summary reports from the affiliated Trades' Councils and discussed supporting activities.

We are currently in the process of organising two theatre productions: Battlelines performed by Banner Theatre which focuses on celebrating the struggle of the 1984/1985 miners' strike, and examines the legacy of that strike and the working class struggles today. We are the Lions, Mr Manager performed by Townsend Productions which is the story of Jayaben Desai - the leader of the 1976-78 Grunwicks Film Processing Factory Strike who spoke out against exploitation, racism and sexism, aimed at striking workers in her workplace.

Tanbir Siddique, Unite, Secretary

11. Jersey

Jersey TUC has had a significant revival in 2024. Several excellent meetings have been held, with the significant support of Unite the Union (James Turner, Keith Falle) to the hard-pressed secretary, Leigh Devine, CWU (Leigh is also a full-time postman and CWU Jersey Secretary). The social legislation for Jersey people, including trades unionists, is still way behind the UK, even if Gurnsey is far worse!

Major issues include the rising costs of living-particularly housing. Despite a first-time buyers' support-scheme, workers are leaving the island, because they cannot afford mortgages and rents. Cost of living prices are one-third to one-half higher than the UK! Pensioners are suffering.

There are excellent relations with the growing number of progressive 'Jersey Reform' councillors-all ten are Unite the Union members-and quarterly meetings with the TUC are

planned. Although major UK unions do not have Jersey memberships, the challenge remains for more unions to come on board-Unite the Union's support this time round has been crucial- to strengthen Jersey TUC. **Dave Chapple, TUC JCC Rep**

12.Mendip



Mendip TUC celebrates the contribution to the trade union movement of the PCS's -and Radstock's-Chris Dando, sixth from right, with fist raised. The photo also displays Dave Lockett's magnificent new Mendip TUC banner

2024 trade union affiliates:24 affiliations from 11 different unions. Meetings were held every month, four live and eight on -line, with one meeting hybrid. Average attendance was 12, with a remarkable average number of apologies: eleven. Highest attendance was at Radstock-see photo-and the lowest, 7, in August. **Live venues:** Portway Annexe, Wells; Pilton Village Hall; Trinity Hub, Radstock; Friends Meeting House, Street, plus an Xmas Social at Paulton Rovers Football Club.

Guest speakers:

- Andy Mitchell and Brett Sparkes, Unite the Union: "The attacks on benefit claimants"
- Dave Lockett, Bermondsey, Mendip TUC Banner-maker
- John Fletcher: "Pilton, a personal history"
- Joe Joseph, Unite the Union: The General Election campaign in Wells and Mendip Hills, Labour and Co-operative Party
- Chris Dando: "My life in the Labour Party and Civil Service unions"
- Amy Willoughby: "The Plotgate Community Farm"
- Joe Joseph: "The Landworkers' Alliance"
- Andy Merryfield: "Somerset Anti-racist Networks"

Regular workplace/union reports received:

- Unite the Union Sun Chemicals-Kevin Horler
- Unite the Union Wells Bus-Chris Dunn
- Unite Somerset and North Devon Community-Dave Chapple, Emma King

- Unite the Union Gloucester, Bristol and Bath Community-Chrissie Wilson
- Unite the Union Bristol Finance-Simon Crew
- UNISON BANES-Fflyff McLaren
- UCU Retired-Eleanor Jackson
- PCS DSA-Chris Dando
- PCS (ARMS) Kevin Russell

Important discussions held: Campaigning against The Light “newspaper.” The Far right. Gaza, Palestine and Israel. **Our new banner:** Dave Lockett’s wonderful new Mendip TUC banner has been applauded-literally!- everywhere it has been taken during 2024.

Campaigns and events initiated or supported:

- Glastonbury Holocaust Memorial Day
- Glastonbury Anti-the ‘Light’ Campaign
- Shepton Mallet TESCO visually-impaired access campaign
- Glastonbury Pride, March and Rally
- Wells Pride (First ever!) March and Rally
- Glastonbury Pharmacy Campaign
- Gaza: Wells Cathedral Vigils
- Gaza: Bath Abbey and Wells events
- Durham Miners Gala
- Tolpuddle Martyrs’ Festival
- Stroud May Day March and Rally
- Mendip TUC Film night: “Everything must Change!”, Frome.

Dave Chapple, Unite the Union, Secretary

13.North Devon and Torridge

Thanks: By putting this report together, the most important thing to recognise, is to thank our affiliated organisations and participating members for keeping this Trades Council alive. We are the only surviving T.U.C-organised body in North Devon & Torridge, and without the support of our affiliates, we would not have a significant presence in putting Trade Unionism, on the agenda locally.

Solidarity and support: We have supported, picket lines and demonstrations with our presence (and banner,) with welcoming support from workers. We supported the Palestinian solidarity rally in Exeter and continued our support at the Annual festival at Tolpuddle, providing subsidised transport again.

National Pensioners Convention: Following an invitation from Glen Burrows, (NPC Gloucester, Avon & Somerset) we attended, with the hope of creating a Devon and Cornwall regional organisation.

North Devon Right to Travel Campaign: We actively support community actions particularly access to public services. As part of our community focus, we have identified the need for a Bus service in a local rural area. Supported by Southwest Unite Retired members and RMT Bus Division, who have been generous in their financial support.



North Devon and Torrridge activists outside Barnstaple's Pannier Market

Promotional initiatives: Facebook: Our North Devon and Torrridge TUC Facebook platform has been a tremendous success story in twelve months of existence, with 156 followers, 593 reactions (90 days) and 149 engagements.

Video (hybrid) meetings: We are extending our reach and accessibility by exploring the use this format!

New 'Roller' banner. I am pleased to report that the new lightweight banner and the roller display works well in its compactness, and durability.

Business Cards: Are yet another initiative we have undertaken in promoting ourselves: easy at hand, and a ready reminder as to who we are, with contact details.

Union Branches: We consider North Devon and Torrridge TUC can, and does, play an important role in providing a forum for trade unionist to attend and seek advice from our council, in the absence of localised trade union branches.

International, national and local events: We shall continue our involvement in supporting and attending events that are in-line with the TUC policies, our affiliated unions' policies, and those of our non-union campaign organisations to which we are affiliated.

- Particularly, supporting the Palestinian and Gaza, catastrophe. The unwarranted withdrawal of the Winter Fuel allowance, championed by, Unite.
- We are keeping a close eye on the proposed closure of Crown Post Offices in our catchment area which will have a direct effect on local community's access to Banking. Investment in promoting our movement.

Growth: We shall review our performance, and the parameters that need improvement, by considering our methods of wider involvement, communication, and accessibility.

Speakers: Our aim is to invite a variety of speakers to make our meetings more interesting, and orientated towards both local and national events.

Trade Union recruitment: We shall continue to promote Trade Union recruitment and festivals. Affiliations and continued support Affiliates and members should recognise that your support is the clay that builds the bricks to our foundations by keeping a Trade Union foot hold in North Devon and Torridge, we therefore thank you once again for your continued support. **Geoff Allen, Unite the Union, Chair**

14.Plymouth

Plymouth Trades Union Council has not stopped campaigning. Locally those reliant upon charitable food banks passed 3 million people, with one-in-three children in Plymouth identified as living in poverty defined as where they could not access at least one of the five basic necessities.

Plymouth Trade Union Council met monthly throughout the year, with core delegates from Unite, UNISON, PCS, RMT, UCU, NEU, NASUWT, supported by affiliates from ASLEF and FBU.

Industrial support:

- We began the year with continued support or the picket lines of the ASLEF train drivers, and offered solidarity to the RMT strike of RFA seafarers.
- As the year progressed, we stood with PCS and GMB security workers employed by G4S at the local Job Centre, part of a national dispute which lasted from March to November before a settlement.
- UNISON Health Care Assistants at Derriford Hospital took strike action with vibrant picket lines in July.
- In March the Junior Doctors of the British Medical Association voted to continue their strike action, and we offered support and solidarity on their picket lines at Derriford Hospital.
- Towards the end of the year, we supported the two-month dispute of the local Unite Plymouth City Council Branch, where home care staff for people with disabilities had failed to be fully paid for their duties for over a year. The dispute received national attention. The Council was condemned for penny-pinching and prevarication, and was settled in January 2025, after 20 days of strike action. The outstanding payments and loss of pay were fully reimbursed, with compensation and new contracts assuring payments when on-call between visits. We offered financial help, and full solidarity, including on picket lines.
- We held a commemoration at the Peace Garden on Plymouth Hoe for Workers' Memorial Day on the 28th April.
- We held a major march and rally in the city for May Day, continuing a long and proud tradition. In 2024 we had Ken Loach, film director and socialist, speak against the devastation caused by 12 years of Tory rule and the need for unity across the Left. More than 100 people attended the event, including the showing of Loach's latest anti-racist film, The Old Oak.

- We have continued to support local and national political campaigns throughout the period. Plymouth has held weekly rallies and marches calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and the end of the Genocide as identified by the International Criminal Court, Amnesty International and Oxfam.
- **It was the Plymouth Trades Union Council working under the guidance of the Stand Up to Racism organisation, with which we are affiliated, that called the counter-demonstration to the “Stop the Boats” far-right protest in Plymouth on 5th August. This racist protest, led by the self-stated racist and misogynist Nick Tenconi, leader of UKIP, broke shop windows, looted and hurled rocks and fireworks and urine-filled bottles at us for 4 hours, but we stood firm. The racist crowd filled-out to 500 people by 9pm whilst we sustained 700 local people. Riot Police made dozens of arrests, and the Sky News Channel broadcast the entire evening live on air, until the core fascist cadre had dispersed. Local politicians had called for people to stay at home! Had we done so, the city centre would have seen a rampage of hatred terrifying people of colour and minorities. We stand proud of our organisation and actions that night.**
- We supported marches and rallies in Plymouth throughout the year called for Safety for Women, joined by the local Trans-Pride group. The rallies have been young and vibrant, with clear speeches against far-right misogyny and the increase in online male-supremacist groups, as well as Trump’s dismissal of the validity and rights of transsexual and non-binary human beings.
- We continue to be at the centre of the local climate & ecological movement, affiliated to the Campaign against Climate Change. We support the expansion of the Plymouth Climate Hub, with help to fund their office base at The Plot.
- The Struggle of the Working Class continues for Peace with Social Justice!
Kevin Treweeks, UNISON, Treasurer, and Tony Staunton, Unite, Honorary President

Note by Dave Chapple: The Plymouth report sent to me was their full annual report to their AGM, which, although I have edited and cut it down, is still c 600 words. I have made an exception, because of the importance of recording the opposition to a large and violent seriously far-right Plymouth city centre riot.

15.Salisbury and District

We still support picket lines within our area. In 2024, ASLEF, RMT and Unison were the main ones. On this theme, we supported the march and rally in Cheltenham on 27th January, regarding ‘Protect the Right to Strike.’

In March we supported the national United Nations Anti-Racism Day in London.

On Friday 22nd March, we, along with Salisbury City Labour Party, attended and supported the annual Thomas Helliker Wreath Laying Memorial in Trowbridge.

We attended the South West TUC Annual Conference in Croyde Bay on 19th/ 20th April, myself as a delegate of the CWU, and Mike Osment as the Salisbury delegate.

On International Workers Memorial Day, Salisbury City Council, at our request, followed through with their commitment to us to fly their flag at half mast, even if it was only in the foyer of the Guild Hall.



Salisbury and District TUC banner on a Anti-“Tommy Robinson” protest, central London, 2024

With the Tory Party calling for a sudden General Election on 4th June, all our focus was on campaigning for the local Constituency Labour Party to deliver a Salisbury MP. Our hard work nearly paid off, because the gap between Tory and Labour was reduced from nearly 20,000 to 3807, a remarkable effort.

Our annual coach trip to Tolpuddle was a success once again. 38 seats were filled of the 53-seat coach. We had four banners from Salisbury in the march, ASLEF, RMT, Salisbury Labour Party and the trades council.

On the 27th July we supported the Unite Against Tommy Robinson; demonstration in London. There were many speakers including the legendary Jeremy Corbyn. There were around 2,000 as opposed to the 10-15,000 supporting the Tommy Robinson demonstration.

The police did an extremely good job of keeping the two demonstrations apart to avoid any violence. Tommy was at it again on 26th October.

At both demonstrations there were powerful speeches from Trade Union leaders and MPs alike and it was inspiring to see so many people from different Trade Unions, faiths and communities from all ethnic backgrounds join together in solidarity and opposing the far-right. **Darren James, CWU, Secretary**

16.Somerset Association of Trades Councils

Three on-line meetings were held during 2024, with an average attendance of 11, from the six trades councils: Bath, Weston and North Somerset; Mendip, Yeovil and District, Bridgwater and District, Taunton and West Somerset. These councils share minutes and keep in contact by advertising their events and inviting visitors from other Somerset TCs to their meetings.

Two delegates were elected to go to the 2024 Trades Councils' Conference, keeping up the high national profile that Somerset has held for the last ten years.

Limited finances, (the officers are recommending an increase in the affiliation fee to £50 per council per annum at our 2025 AGM) and the pressure on the officers of their own TUC roles, mean that the Somerset Association does not function, unfortunately, as a Somerset campaigning body in itself, but is restricted to a co-ordinating role.

Nonetheless, as the summer anti-fascist protests in Yeovil and Taunton proved, we can mobilise considerable numbers of trades unionists and progressive campaigners when the issue is important.

Main concerns:

- Countering the Somerset far-right protests;
- The Somerset Council's budget cuts and mass redundancies;
- The ever-increasing flood risk and actual flooding in and around the Central Somerset Levels. Mendip TUC heard from South west FBU Secretary Dave Roberts at their February 2025 meeting, where he shocked delegates by informing them that dealing with floods was not a core statutory duty of the Fire and Rescue service!



Mudford village, near Yeovil, flooded yet again in January 2024. Pic Viv Willis.

October 2024: Somerset flooding risk: Viv Willis gave an example from his own village, Mudford near Yeovil, as to the increased flood risk that many South Somerset people faced. Flooding in this village, (see Viv's photo) and neighbouring Marston Magna, Queen Camel and West Camel had never been worse! Roads are not being repaired; hedges and ditches are not being cropped and cleaned out; drains are not being un-locked; and to cap it all, we have more and more planning applications for new housing on low-lying ground, and climate change drives and lies behind it all.

Dave Chapple, CWU/Unite the Union, Secretary

17. Stroud



Stroud's magnificent banner on their 2024 May Day March and Rally, with The Stroud Red Band, and TUC chair Bob Blenkinsop at right of banner

Stroud Trades Council is now in its second year of existence, and has a growing number of delegates and union affiliations.

- Speakers invited to the monthly meetings have introduced discussions on a wide range of topics including housing, the NHS, trade unionists in Nigeria, the influence of far-right media and Chartism past and present.
- The Stroud Green Party parliamentary candidate was invited to speak before the May election Themes for monthly street stalls have included Heart Unions week, USDAW freedom from fear and NEU fighting school cuts.
- A stand was organised at the Gloucestershire Labour Party regional conference to raise the profile of Trades Councils in the county.

- Delegates attended the Tolpuddle festival and Newport Arising. Local events have received funding and support from the Trades Council, including Stroud Black History week, the UNITE 'Los Fastidios' concert in a local pub and the development of a Stroud Chartist Festival for this May.
- The Trades Council provided a speaker for the Stroud Holocaust Memorial Day event and a large Stroud 'Stand up to Racism' rally in August.
- The Stroud delegate to the annual Trades Council Conference in London spoke to support an amendment to a motion on venue accessibility proposed by Stroud.
- Over the year Stroud Trades Council has taken part in the development of the new Gloucestershire Trades Council Association.
- During August delegates took part in local actions to counter the growing threat of racism and far-right violence.
- During the autumn UNITE Energy4all events were supported including a protest outside the HQ of Ecotricity, as the company does not formally recognise Unions and a winter warmer event occupying the main Stroud library dressed in thick layers of clothing
- Stroud Trades Council organised the annual Stroud Mayday march and rally with speakers representing the South West TUC, local community groups, trade unions, and a speech from Stroud's former Labour MP David Drew. The procession around town was led by the Stroud Red Band playing stirring music! **Ruth Amias, Secretary**

18.Taunton and West Somerset

The key issue for Taunton and West Somerset Trades Council since its AGM last March has been the financial emergency at Somerset Council which is set to cost hundreds of our members in Unison, Unite and GMB their jobs and bring drastic reductions in public services.

The cuts will cause life threatening changes to many and impact everyone in our community. We have had regular reports from Unite and Unison and are preparing to campaign on this issue during Heart Unions Week in Taunton town centre, and with a lobby outside two full Somerset Council meetings in February 2025.

We organised well-attended in-person hustings prior to the general election, thus ensuring candidates from all parties would answer our key questions.

We took our big red banner to the Tolpuddle Festival and to the Taunton RMT Bus Branch's picket line in July and August, on four occasions, in solidarity with their strike action against First Bus.

Trades Council representatives attended the Hiroshima Day Quaker-organised vigil in Taunton on 6th August.

We were out in force for two unity rallies in Taunton against racism and fascism in mid-August, one organised by ourselves and the other by Taunton Black Lives Matter. These were very well supported and attracted positive coverage across a range of media. The threatened ultra-right marches did not take place on either day.

In June we welcomed Rob Ewers, a director of Taunton Pride, as a guest speaker and were represented at the very successful event in Vivary Park in September.

We also, through invited contributions, focussed on getting to know better our member unions. and our thanks for this especially go to Kerry Baigent and Jane Jackson (Unison Regional Secretary and Regional Manager respectively), Nigel Behan (Unite), Grace Dunn (RMT), Matthew Smith (UCU) and Logan Williams (NEU).

Liz Payne-Ahmadi, UNISON, Secretary



Taunton and West Somerset TUC activists and banner at the town' Bus Depot, supporting the RMT pay strike picket

19. Weston and North Somerset Trades Union Council



Retiring Weston and North Somerset Secretary Richard Capps, and Bakers Union delegate Dave Dash, at their 2024 Heart Unions' Week stall in the High Street

Activities: The Trades Union Council continued to meet throughout the year. Members represented our Trades Council at union meetings across the South West, including the South West TUC, SW National Pensioners' Congress, SW Trades Union Council AGM, and the SW TUC Regional Council.

Labour Government: Members expressed a range of opinions concerning the election of a Labour Government and having, for the first time ever, two Labour MPs in our district! We recognise that having local Labour MPs gives us an opportunity to question local MPs who are sympathetic to the union movement. We are arranging a meeting with both shortly.

Delegates took part in the '**Protect the Right to Strike**' demonstration in January in Cheltenham and attended '**Stand Up to Racism**' demonstrations in Bristol and London.

We have recently bought a **new banner** and are looking forward to marching with it!

We held another Christmas fundraiser for **Weston Foodbank** in December, we had a great time and raised £230.

Growing the active membership: We continue to have a small number of active members, but we are keen to engage with our wider membership and so sent out a survey to help inform this. We've also been contacting local unions direct, trying to encourage affiliation and/or more active involvement. We have launched a new Facebook page. - <https://www.facebook.com/WNSTUC/> Please follow us!

Future plans: Our first priority for 2025 is finding ways to combat the toxic messages of Reform in the local area, we've passed a PCS motion to this effect and will be discussing ideas at the AGM. We also plan to do more awareness raising (a stand is planned for Heart Unions week). **Louise Branch, UNISON, Secretary**

20.White Horse (Wiltshire) Trades Council Report

White Horse Trades Council have shown solidarity attending picket lines and rallies during recent and current industrial action. We have been concerned about recent actions by Wiltshire Council to make financial savings, its lack of transparency, and the impact this will have on staff and services. We have raised our concerns with Councillors. The Wiltshire Local Government UNISON Branch, UNISON Wiltshire and Avon Health Branch and the UNISON SW Region are actively campaigning against the Integrated Care Board's decision to transfer community healthcare to HCRG (formerly Virgin), with associated major changes to terms, conditions and union recognition. We remain totally opposed to the award of the contract to HCRG, and will continue to fight privatization in the NHS.

We are currently organizing the wreath laying to commemorate Thomas Helliker which will take place at noon on 22 March 2025 at Thomas Helliker's tomb in St James Churchyard, Trowbridge. Thomas Helliker, known as the Trowbridge Martyr, who was hanged on his 19th birthday 22 March 1803. When shearing frames were introduced at Littleton Mill it was burned to the ground on 22 July 1802. Thomas is believed to have been innocent, but knew those who carried it out, but refused to name them. White Horse Trades Council holds a bi-annual event to commemorate his life and untimely death.



Thomas Helliker Memorial Day, Trowbridge Parish Churchyard, March 2024

This year we have sponsored 'The Innocent' a professional performance in words and songs about the life and death of Thomas Helliker written by Mick Ryan, who previously co-wrote with Graham Moore 'A Tolpuddle Man', and has written various folk operas including 'A Day's Work', and 'The Navvies.' The music has been written by Mick and Steven Faux who is an award-winning composer of music for film, television and radio. This will be performed on the evening of Saturday 22 March at The Cause, Chippenham.

Rosie MacGregor, UNISON, Secretary

21.Yeovil and District

As usual, we struggle on with limited finances, and a handful of active delegates. We have nine unions that affiliated this year but only see delegates from ASLEF, a couple of Unite Branches, and the NUJ. I have contacted a number of people about getting new affiliations, but often with no reply.

Thanks to Zoom, I have attended meetings of various trades councils around Somerset and Dorset in order to raise awareness of what other trades councils are doing. I play an active part in South West TUC Regional Council, and the Somerset Association of TUCs. I also try to play an active part in National Pensioners' Convention Region.

Despite the problems, we still try to support events where we can. We were pleased to attend the right to strike demo in Cheltenham last year. We were also pleased to support the Yeovil Together event, which helped build the contacts needed for a successful counter protest when the Far-Right threatened to cause trouble in Yeovil.

We also attended picket lines at Yeovil bus station in support of the RMT dispute with their employer, and we continue to the campaign to save the Hyper Acute Stroke Unit at Yeovil

hospital, and supported a street stall to highlight Unite's campaign to restore winter fuels payments.

Finally, we are trying hard to arrange a showing of the London Recruits film in our area. Y&DTUC helped organise with Yeovil SUTR a protest/demo – which attracted good local legacy media attention with our old banner featuring – at St John's churchyard countering the fascists demo where, in the event only a very few turned out.



Dave Osborne, Yeovil and District Secretary, left, with former Westland's Helicopters' Union Convenor and staunch socialist Bill Byrd, who sadly passed away aged 88 in 2024.

Dave Osborne, Unite the Union

Thanks!

- To Ines Lage, Sadie Fulton and Tanya Parker at the South West TUC, whose support for trades councils is exemplary
- To those senior regional officers of trade unions, who find time to promote and support us: I only wish and hope that ALL did!
- To all those trades council secretaries who keep me in touch, by sending me their minutes of meetings and media releases. Can ALL secretaries consider this please?
- To all those trades councils who invite me to meetings to discuss anything and everything concerning our work. Such invitations can be at on-line, hybrid or live meetings, and I have a free GWR rail pass (Courtesy of my partner Glen Burrows' RMT membership) to get anywhere in the South West free of charge, and the TUC will pay for any overnight stay, so it will not cost you anything to have me!
- To all South West Trades Council officers and delegates, who continue to ensure we do have a regional trade union MOVEMENT, as opposed to a collection of individual union bodies.
- To my wonderful friends and comrades at Bridgwater and Mendip TUCs, whose meetings and other activities, never acrimonious, and always truly comradely, I am proud to organise.

Dave Chapple, February 10th 2025