TRADES UNION COUNCILS
PROGRAMME OF WORK
2015-2016

Trade Unions Bill: Unfair, unnecessary and undemocratic
Introduction

The government’s failure to reduce the deficit is now obvious. A five-year programme has become ten years, with the scale of cuts proposed roughly doubling and more than half still to come. Less attention has been paid to why the public finances have gone so far off the rails.

The cuts have been self-defeating. The failure to reduce the deficit is a result of deteriorating economic conditions that are a direct result of the cuts themselves. In other words a vicious circle:

- Austerity has reduced government demand
- Reduced government demand held back economic growth
- The labour market and wages weakened to accommodate reduced growth
- Reduced labour income growth means reduced government revenues as the tax take falls, so at best deficit reduction has stalled with a cumulative failure over this parliament amounting to around £150bn in extra borrowing.

Cuts in government spending therefore result in falling government income. Spending cuts, rather than reducing the deficit, end up having little impact on it. But lower levels of government spending not only hit vital services but depress the whole economy leading to falling living standards and an economy that is working well below its potential.

International evidence reinforces this argument. We have seen the same story in all advanced economies. Reductions in growth across developed nations correspond closely to the extent of austerity programmes.

The extraordinary severity of the cuts the OBR say are necessary to meet the current Chancellor’s election programme would lock the economy into a cycle of further decline and even threaten recession.

The alternative is to end austerity, and reverse the policy-levers with large-scale infrastructure spending and policies to boost wages, including an end to the public sector wage freeze, coupled with supply-side reforms to banking, industrial policy, corporate governance and skills.

Trade unions need to construct a movement for a positive alternative based on an end to austerity economics. Trade unions must show how the best performing economies are built on a fair society, great public services and decent rights for all.
Union rights under attack

The new majority Conservative government is intent on implementing a divisive and anti-trade union manifesto that will further undermine collective bargaining and effective trade union representation.

Conservative proposals to change the law on industrial action ballots will shift the balance of power even further against working people, making legal strikes much harder and undermining civil liberties into the bargain. Attacks on trade unions – the only independent democratic organisations representing working people - show this government’s true colours. After the longest fall in living standards since Queen Victoria was on the throne, they are determined to weaken workers’ bargaining power and strip us of our best chance of improving pay and security at work.

Trades union councils have a vital role to play in this campaign - building union strength in the community, ensuring that the real facts about unions and the contribution the make to our society is got across and understood by society at local and national level.

Trades union councils must also be there to support unions in building those new alliances in the workplace, help grow union membership and build a mass movement to put pressure on government. That is why we need a united union response. Unity is essential.

Welfare rights under attack

This majority Conservative government is intent on making the poorest and most vulnerable pay for a crisis not of their making; that will hurt working families, damage our economy and make inequality even worse.

Deep cuts to welfare can only be achieved by hitting the vulnerable and slashing the help that millions of low paid workers need to make ends meet – the very blue collar hard workers Conservatives claim to champion.
Trades union councils have a vital role to play in pulling unions together at local level, supporting disputes and campaigning against the cuts. This should include building support and momentum at local level to maximise the coordination of any industrial action.

Trades union councils need to build the confidence of trade unionists that we can defeat this Government.

A vigorous campaign is needed against anti-trade union laws as well as supporting unions that are building in unorganised areas such as the fast food industry.

Trades union councils role is to promote unity between public and private sector workers as we all need decent jobs, pay and pensions, including campaigning and taking action together.

The task that trade unions and trades union councils face is to build our strength in workplaces and reach out to communities. Trade unions need to win new allies and maximise pressure on the government to resist their worst proposals.

**Fighting racism and providing real answers to concerns about immigration**

We need to show that migrant workers are not to blame for low pay and lousy jobs. Our deregulated labour market allows employers to exploit low cost workers from elsewhere in the EU and beyond in place of local workers. We need to up our game in campaigning for real regulation of the labour market and for much higher minimum/living wage levels and for an end to exploitative zero hours contracts, bogus self-employment etc.

Austerity cuts mean affordable housing and public services are in short supply, creating tensions between communities.

Racists and fascists are trying to exploit these tensions and lay the blame on immigrants rather than on government policies for the problems working class people face.

This is no easy challenge but the solidarity and shared values upon which the trade union movement is built hold true and our ranks are resilient. That gives us a strong foundation on which to win - not just for our members but for our wider communities too.
Trades Union Councils 2015 – 2016 Programme of Work

The key theme for the Trades Union Councils Programme of Work for 2015 to 2016 must be setting out a positive vision of trade unions as we know them to be: a democratic force for fairness in the modern workplace.

The key areas of campaigning for the year are:

1. Protecting workers’ rights to organise together
2. An end to austerity economics
3. A twenty-first century Europe
4. Making devolution and decentralisation work
5. Reaching out to young workers
6. Fighting racism and defending black, Asian and ethnic minority workers
7. Defending the Welfare State

1. Protecting workers’ rights to organise together

The Trade Unions Bill announced in the Queen’s Speech looks set to:

- Encourage strike breaking by lifting the ban on the use of agency workers during strikes
- Criminalise picketing and open union organisers to state surveillance
- Introduce undemocratic strike ballot thresholds

Trades councils will campaign locally and support national initiatives that:

- Highlight the illiberal and anti-democratic nature of the proposals.
- Develop the widest possible campaign against the Bill, working across all political parties.
- Support a major mass lobby of parliament and rally.
- Challenge the public on outdated stereotypes about strikes and trade unions, and show the real face of modern trade unionism.
- Expose the Government’s anti-union offensive, particularly in the civil service and the public sector, and the damage the new rules would cause to industrial relations and sensible dispute resolution
- Expose the blacklisting and victimisation of union reps

2. An end to austerity economics

Trades union councils will:

- Use every opportunity to expose how austerity fails and rips the local community apart
- Press for an alternative economic model at local and national level which delivers good sustainable jobs for all
The fight against austerity is our central campaign priority. We will resist cuts and wage freezes. We will fight for decent jobs, particularly for young people, and investment in skills. We will press for fair tax that stops avoidance and evasion and makes those who profited the most pay the costs of clearing-up the damage. We will defend gains made that advance equality, as women, BME, disabled and LGBT citizens suffer as services are cut and the economy slows.

Cuts in public sector jobs inevitably lead to cuts in services, affecting entire communities and our quality of life.

The Trades Union Councils Conference policy is to call for the public ownership of banking and finances as the first step to creating a new kind of society. The 2012 and 2014 Conferences called on trades union councils to vigorously campaign for the adoption of a programme of public ownership under democratic control.

This year’s conference called on county associations and trades union councils to organise local conferences of councillors, trade unions and other activists opposed to government imposed service cuts. The aim of the conferences will be to build and strengthen existing anti-cuts movements and to build for alternatives to austerity.

Rather than build a new, less unequal and more sustainable economy this government wants to use the crash to shrink the state, reduce rights and set inequality in stone.

**Trades union councils will fight for an alternative – a future that works.**

3. **A twenty-first century Europe**

The TUC wants Britain to be part of a people’s Europe that is fair and fit for the challenges of the twenty-first century. The EU’s single market must be balanced with a strong voice, rights and protection for ordinary people and their unions.

The Prime Minister wants to end the rights that we owe to Europe – working time protection such as paid holidays, rights for agency workers and equal treatment – so that he can offer a false choice in a referendum between either leaving the EU or giving up basic rights.

The Tory government aims to renegotiate the fair bargain that lies at the heart of social Europe, offering voters a false choice. The Prime Minister wants Britain to stay in the EU but one stripped of employee rights, environmental protection and consumer safeguards. Some business leaders are encouraging him, dismissing hard
won rights – health and safety, paid holidays, consultation on redundancies, protection for outsourced workers, equal rights for part-timers and agency workers, and maternity – as “lifestyle” issues or red tape.

Trades councils need to deliver a strong message to the government that they won’t win workers’ referendum votes by worsening rights. But we must also campaign for a better Europe; not one in which austerity, privatisation and the weakening of workers’ rights are the watchwords. We will campaign for a reformed EU that delivers a strong social model and the green investment, decent jobs and rights, public services and the strong voice that working people need.

In line with TUC policy, this year’s conference passed a resolution on the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) opposing TTIP and calling on trades union councils to step up their local campaigns in order to increase public awareness of the dangers of TTIP and to bring pressure on MPs and Euro-MPS to resist the imposition of this dangerous legislation.

4. Making devolution and decentralisation work

The much publicised ‘Northern powerhouse’ idea and the devolution of control of public services could offer opportunities for unions, but they also pose significant risks to national public service standards, pay arrangements and accountability. We will not accept a devolution model that simply devolves austerity cuts from Government to the regions; forces elected mayors on communities who do want it; or breaks up national public services like the NHS.

Trades union councils will:
- Campaign locally for a strong union voice in decentralised and devolved administrations, building on the social partnership model in Wales.
- Support campaigns to resist further breaking up of national bargaining and employment law, health and safety, equalities and NMW legislation - on which many collective agreements build - which could lead to a race to the bottom.
- Support unions in the public sector in campaigns to organise and bargain effectively, even in a fragmented environment.

5. Reaching out to young workers

Young people are on the front line of austerity, often stuck in low paid jobs below their talent, sometimes saddled with student debt and often with little chance of saving enough for a deposit to rent - never mind buy – a home of their own. The
picture for young women, black and ethnic minority, lesbian and gay, disabled and other groups facing prejudice and discrimination is even worse.

Union membership and density among young workers is low, and young people are increasingly working in industries where jobs are insecure, staff turnover is high and there is little trade union presence.

Yet all the evidence is that many more young people support trade union values and campaigns. Our challenge is to reach out to new generation of workers, and the next generation of union leaders, and convert that sympathy into strong union organisation.

**Trades union councils will:**

- Support the TUC public facing campaign, to run over the next two years, designed to appeal to young workers
- Work with unions locally to develop ways to make it easier for young people to join and be active in trade unions.
- Support union organising campaigns with young workers in the private sector

**6. Fighting racism and defending black, Asian and ethnic minority workers**

This year’s conference also reaffirmed its policy in promoting racial justice, engaging in anti-racist awareness promotions and sharing anti-racist materials in the workplace and in the community. This was in recognition of the rise in popularity of right wing groups in union structures. These groups could be a real threat to unity amongst workers in the fight for workplace and justice and defence of the living standards.

**7. Defending the Welfare State**

**Trades union councils will:**

- Oppose outsourcing and privatisation at local and national level
- Fight NHS fragmentation and defend local health services
- Expose the effects of the government’s cuts on services, benefits and working people at local level
- Campaign to defend welfare and oppose the stigmatisation of claimants

Public services are under huge pressure. Local councils are being hammered and the Chancellor has introduced a further £12bn cut in the welfare budget.

We were told the NHS would be protected, but waiting times are up, bed shortages common and GP services barely able to cope, with many practices closing.

The public realm is under a dangerous twin attack. Austerity economics is used to justify cuts, but the real objective is just as much to shrink the state permanently and open up vital services to private profit. This is a political choice, not an economic necessity.
The welfare state – the safety net which any of us might need – is threatened. Ministers and their media allies have used public hostility against those who cheat the system to try to undermine the whole welfare system.

The unemployed are increasingly treated as if losing their job was their fault, with a six-week wait for any benefits, an unfair sanctions regime and workfare schemes no different from those used for offenders being punished by the courts.

The TUC and the TUCJCC are asking trades union councils to build and extend alliances with service users and the wider community, to work with every possible ally to defend the welfare state and public services realm against privatisation.

Fighting service cuts, defending welfare and opposing privatisation will be key campaigns for trades union councils and communities.

The Peoples’ Assembly Against Austerity

The TUCJCC and the trades union council conference continue to support the principles of the People’s Charter and welcomed its merger with the Peoples’ Assembly and the publication of the Peoples’ Assembly Manifesto.

The TUCJCC is calling on all trades union councils to:

- To support the People’s Assembly and promote it locally;
- Respond positively to approaches for Assembly activists to regularly attend trades union council meetings;
- Identify a “link person” with the Assembly and to keep it on the trades council agenda and contact the People’s Assembly at office@thepeoplesassembly.org.uk. Also to create an account with the People’s Assembly at www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/.

The People’s Assembly Manifesto has identified set of six major reforms to reverse the crisis and the government's austerity policy:

- A fair economy for a fairer Britain
- More and better jobs
- Decent homes for all
- Protecting and improving public services
Social justice
A secure and sustainable future and for urgent action against global warming.

These principles, and the programme behind them, have been endorsed by Congress as well as the trades union council conference.

The People’s Assembly is also planning a series of protests and events during the Conservative Party Conference. To find out what is planned, visit: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/calendar

Trades union councils are asked to work with the People’s Assembly in their campaigning. Information about the People's Assembly, the Charter and the manifesto can be found at www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/. or write to: The People’s Assembly, 52 Beachy Road, London E3 2NS

Ten Things You Can Do To Help Us Win

- Build in your workplace and community for the TUC national demonstration against austerity at October’s Tory Party conference in Manchester.
- Join the TUC’s digital army by signing up to Going to Work www.goingtowork.org.uk
- Share how austerity has blighted your community at the False Economy website http://falseeconomy.org.uk
- Back the Saving our Safety Net campaign and tell the government to scrap plans to make people wait at least five weeks for unemployment benefits www.savingoursafetynet.org
- Join local community campaigns to defend the NHS http://alltogetherforthenhs.org
- Press your local council to back the Robin Hood Tax
- Support organisations like Defend Council Housing and campaign for decent affordable homes for all including by building more council homes, ending the "right to buy" and stopping its extension to housing associations; and controlling private rents
- Join your local public services campaign – contact your TUC region
- Back TUC international solidarity actions through the Going to Work website www.goingtowork.org.uk
- Put the TUC’s Campaign Plan on your trades union council agenda.
Contacts and links

Trades union councils' joint consultative committee

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Matt Wrack FBU

General Council Members
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Dave Harvey, NUT
Tony Kearns, CWU
Pat Stuart, Unite
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Committee members can also be contacted:
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Useful Publications and Contacts

The TUCJCC pamphlet ‘Community’ has been especially produced for trades union councils to explain the value of union branches affiliating to their local trades union council or establishing a trades council where one does not exist.

The TUCJCC has also produced ‘The Journey’ a pocket sized pamphlet that pulls out to tell the reader about the benefits to their daily lives of joining a union as well as in their workplace. This is for use by trades union councils and unions as part of their union membership recruitment campaign.

These two publications are available from the TUC’s Organising and Services Department by contacting Tom Mellish on tmellish@tuc.org.uk or telephoning 020 7467 1380.

Touchstone Blog – for latest information on the economy and ‘Cuts Watch’ go to www.touchstoneblog.org.uk/about/

Green workplaces Network – For all your information on the green workplace, contacts and activist networks go to: www.tuc.org.uk/workplace/index.cfm?mins=87&minors=4&majorsubjectID=2

Black Workers - The TUC has produced a short guide on negotiating for race equality at work to help trade union stewards and activists. The guide explores a selection of issues relevant to black workers to help familiarise trade unionists with the some of the most commonly occurring concerns, many of which have been dealt with through legal proceedings. There are also checklists that provide a starting point to enable activists to start developing bargaining goals. www.tuc.org.uk/extras/collectivebargaining.pdf

LGBT Workers -The TUC has published updated guidance for unions taking into account recent legal changes and current good practice: LGBT Equality at Work: - a TUC guide for union negotiators on lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans issues. This is available on-line at www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-19413-f0.cfm Trades councils may wish to start preparing for LGBT History Month in February 2015. Go to www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk/ for all the information you'll need, lots of ideas and contacts presented in a lively way as well as reports on previous events. For a wide range of information on LGBT in the union world, including the new Trades Union Trans Network, go to www.tuc.org.uk/equality/index.cfm?mins=108&minors=24&majorsubjectID=6

The impact on women of recession and austerity - This report, prepared for TUC Women’s Conference 2015, takes stock and looks at how women have fared through recession and austerity. It finds that while progress on some headline measures of gender equality has continued – the employment and pay gap have continued to narrow, for example – some women are facing new hardships and barriers to equality. Go to www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/WomenRecession.pdf
Where to get labour movement and counter-austerity publications

For a broad range of left wing publications go to Bookmarks www.bookmarksbookshop.co.uk where you can order on-line or visit the shop at 1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3QE (around the corner from the TUC) - 020 7637 1848 or enquiries@bookmarks.uk.com.

Also, The Peoples Bookshop, Third Floor, The Attic, Saddlers Yard, 70 Saddler Street, Durham DH1 3NP http://peoplesbookshop.co.uk/ You email the shop through their webpage.

The Alliance of Radical Bookshops
Very useful site with the contact details of a number of left-leaning bookshops. Many offer on-line services and not all the bookshops are in London! www.radicalbooksellers.co.uk/?page_id=2

News from Nowhere
Liverpool's Radical & Community Bookshop - not-for-profit · a worker's cooperative committed to social change www.newsfromnowhere.org.uk/index.php

The Morning Star – for daily news and information about the labour movement. The Morning Star is available from some major supermarket chains and can be ordered through your local newsagent at no cost to the newsagent on a sale or return basis. Also available online at www.morningstaronline.co.uk

Many unions produce guidance on issues raised in this document. Check with affiliated unions to see if they have publications relevant and useful to your work. Also visit ‘unionsinthecommunity’ (or go to www.unionsinthecommunity.org.uk) the site set-up specifically for trades union councils

Contacts

The current directory of trades union councils can found on-line at www.tuc.org.uk/about-tuc/regions/britains-unions/union-issues/2015-directory-trades-union-councils or email Tom Mellish on tmellish@tuc.org.uk for a hard copy.

The TUC Information Services Team supports trades union councils with information and contact details on the issues raised in this document and across the full range of trade union activity. Email info@tuc.org.uk or telephone 020 7467 1262.

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Friends of the Earth
26-28 Underwood Street
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020 7490 1555
Email through web site
Website www.foe.co.uk/index.html for a quicker response
Hazards (Magazine) – health and safety information and networking on H&S
PO Box 4042
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Email editor@hazards.org
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Hope Not Hate
PO Box 67476
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Website: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk

Trade Union Friends of Searchlight
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Email: info@lovemusichateracism.com
Web site: www.searchlightmagazine.com

Unite Against Fascism
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Email only through web site
http://uaf.org.uk/

A full range of links to TUC Web Sites dealing with politics, research, environment, employment rights and many other aspects of our work can be found at https://www.tuc.org.uk/other-tuc-websites