

WEST COUNTRY WORKERS

NEWS FROM THE SOUTH WEST TUC
ISSUE 7 2019

Changing the world
of work for good

TUC South West



Zero-hour contracts

Stamp them out now
Page 2



Sun, sea and poor pay

A workers' view from the hidden St Ives
Page 4



Time for a four-day week

TUC general secretary says unions must take back control of working time
Page 7

2 TUC fights to stamp out zero-hours contracts

Alex Collinson explains what unions are doing to protect vulnerable workers



Above: Alex Collinson is a Policy and Campaigns Support Officer for the TUC's Economic and Social Affairs Department.

There are 80,000 workers in the South West on zero hours contracts, many of them struggling to make ends meet or forced to take second – sometimes third – jobs to cover the cost of living.

Last December the government had the chance to ban these pernicious contracts when it responded to the Taylor Review into working practices.

But it failed, introducing instead a 'right to request' a more stable and predictable contract after six months in the job.

The right to request a stable contract, however, is no right at all. It gives workers no power at all, and doesn't help to shift the balance of power.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady dismissed the move, saying: "Unless unions get the right to organise and bargain for workers in places like Uber and Amazon, too many working people will continue to be treated like disposable labour.

"The right to request guaranteed working hours is no right at all. Zero-hours contract workers will have no more leverage than Oliver Twist."

- Young workers are more likely to be on zero hours contracts. 36% of people on zero-hour contracts are aged 16 to 24, compared with 11% for all people in employment not on a zero-hour contract
- Zero-hour contracts are more prominent in specific industries. Almost a quarter of people in employment on a zero-hour contract are in the accommodation and food industry

There's a lot of reasons workers don't like zero-hour contracts. The lack of guaranteed hours means that financial planning and budgeting becomes almost impossible, with shifts (and therefore income) being subject to constant change. This is particularly hard for those with families who have to plan childcare.

The balance of power is firmly on the side of the employer. Those on zero-hour contracts rely entirely on their bosses to allocate work to them each week. We know that one of the day-to-day experiences is a fear of falling out of favour with your boss, or getting a reputation as being unreliable.

Many people on zero-hour contracts lose out on the rights that are important to them and which

most of us take for granted in the workplace. In a TUC poll conducted last year, for example, 82% of zero-hour contract workers said they don't receive sick pay. We know that those on zero-hour contracts often go to work when ill as they won't get paid otherwise.

This is unacceptable, which is why the TUC, together with unions, is doing all it can to change the law on zero hours contracts. ■

Union wins end of zero-hours

Catriona Scott, a Regional Support Official for the Universities and College Union, based in Exeter, told *West Country Workers* how zero-hour contracts placed major obstacles in the way of lecturers delivering the quality support students deserve.

In a recent UCU survey of staff on insecure contracts, significant numbers of respondents said they struggled to pay the bills, keeping up with mortgage or rent commitments, and difficulties putting food on the table. When UCU negotiated a new lecturer contract at City of Bristol, we ensured all teaching staff on zero-hours contracts were offered proper contracts with employee status.

We welcome the fact that City of Bristol College no longer uses exploitative zero-hours contracts where the work is clearly regular and ongoing, and we want all others to follow suit.

Students coming into colleges deserve to know that the people that make their education possible are employed on contracts, pay rates and terms and conditions that enable them to do their jobs properly. A good student experience is not guaranteed by the quality of a building but by the quality of the educational experience.

“Those on zero-hour contracts rely entirely on their bosses to allocate work to them each week”

Zero hours contracts

- Zero hours contracts normally mean there is no obligation for employers to offer work, or for workers to accept it.
- Most zero hours contracts will give staff 'worker' employment status.
- Zero hours workers have the same employment rights as regular workers, although they may have breaks in their contracts, which affect rights that accrue over time.
- Zero hours workers are entitled to annual leave, the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage and pay for work-related travel in the same way as regular workers.
- 'Exclusivity clauses', where an employer restricts workers from working for other employers are unlawful. There is no qualifying period to bring an unfair dismissal claim for this reason.

When are zero hours contracts used?

Zero hours contracts can be used to provide a flexible workforce to meet a temporary or changeable need for staff. Examples may include a need for workers to cover:

- unexpected or last-minute events
- temporary staff shortages
- on-call/bank work

But some employers are using zero-hour and other insecure contracts to use the ability to cut hours as a means of control over workers.

“82% of zero-hour contract workers said they don't receive sick pay”

Sun, sea and poor pay

St Ives, for most people, conjures up images of sea, sand, surf, beautiful beaches and Barbara Hepworth sculptures in the Tate gallery.



Kirsty Arthur and her family

But a mile up the hill from the narrow cobbled streets and fishermen's cottages is another St Ives that few visitors see.

"It's a town of two halves", town councillor Kirsty Arthur tells *Tim Lezard*. "There's the town that everyone sees, that everyone comes to visit, and there's the town where all the workers live, crammed into houses, struggling to afford the rent.

"These are the people who need foodbanks, who are on minimum hours, minimum wage contracts. For many people the pay is so bad where we live they can't afford to get on the housing ladder."

Kirsty has three jobs – in a supermarket, for the Police and Crime Commissioner and selling scented wax; her husband works full-time in photography, but still they struggle.

"We don't go on holiday because we can't afford it," she says. "People around here are living in poverty. It's

Kirsty's union, Usdaw, is calling on the government to strengthen workers' rights by introducing:

- A minimum wage rate of at least £10 per hour for all workers.
- A minimum contract of 16 hours per week for everyone who wants it.
- A contract based on an individual's normal hours of work.
- An end to zero-hours contracts.

Nick Ireland, Usdaw's regional secretary, said: "Going out to work should mean a decent standard of living for everyone.

"We need real and urgent improvements to workers' rights to deliver an economy which works in favour of all working people. Through a petition to government we are seeking to force the government to respond directly to our calls."

not just a handful of people going to the foodbank – it's families with two adults, both of whom are working."

Part of the problem is caused by the prevalence of zero hours contracts. Although Kirsty's employer does not use them – she's an Usdaw rep – other firms in the town do. Like a lot of Cornwall, work in St Ives is largely seasonal, running from Easter until the August bank holiday, when the county is overflowing with holiday-makers. Local people hope to make money through working overtime during the summer to tide them over during the quiet winter months when they may not have a job.

"We have lots of seasonal workers here but the trouble comes when people need a job all year round and there isn't one," says Kirsty.

"You can't always rely on overtime, but many people try to, then go



back to the bare bones in the winter months. It's all very well for the government to say we have more people in work than ever before, but that's no good when that work isn't enough to earn a living.

"People are working but earning so little they still need to claim benefits. And because of government cuts there's nowhere to go for advice on receiving these benefits. It's really difficult to access help to the benefit system. I'm not a stupid person, I'm not an idiot, but I struggle to understand the system. People are feeling the strain." ■

"We have lots of seasonal workers here but the trouble comes when people need a job all year round and there isn't one"



“I can’t afford to be ill”

Researchers lift the lid on working under zero-hour contracts.

In 2016 a group of academics interviewed 36 UK workers on non-standard contracts as part of their research for the Low Pay Commission.

The testimonies expose the idea that zero-hour contracts help reconcile paid work with other life commitments. The research found instead they generate conflict between work and other priorities.

“We’re actually being told now that this job is 24/7. If you don’t want to do those hours, you shouldn’t have come to the company.” (Mary, homecare worker).

“Everything is up in the air. The rotas are up in the air. I can do without the stress. I need something more permanent, that’s safer. I never know when I’m going to get the hours and then I don’t know if I’m going to get enough hours or too many hours. I’m on a zero-hour contract, I feel like I’m all over the place.” (Care worker)

Zero hour workers face periods of unpaid labour which leaves them reliant on a welfare system that finds such erratic employment difficult to support.

“I’ve been told I can’t do more than 16 hours, not if I want to keep my benefits rolling with my house, which I need to because it’s a

private property. I can’t afford to mess it up. I really can’t afford to.” (Alexis, retail worker)

“In my store you have to check the rota constantly throughout the week to make sure your shifts haven’t been cancelled. So you’re always worrying about whether you’ll be able to get enough hours to make ends meet.” (Retail worker)

Workers on such contracts understood their status increased their dependence upon employers and managers. Whatever choice over work they might have in theory, the balance of power in the workplace was not in their favour. Their dependence upon employers to allocate hours made them vulnerable and diminished their control over working lives with concrete implications for work-life balance.

“You don’t have much of a lifestyle. You’re just working to survive.” (Retail worker)

Many employers expect zero-hour workers to come into work with very little warning. TUC polling found more than half (51%) of zero-hours workers have had shifts cancelled at less than 24 hours’ notice. And nearly three-quarters (73%) have been offered work at less than 24

“We’re being told if we don’t want a job that’s 24/7 then we shouldn’t have come to the company”

hours’ notice. Workers fear that refusing to take up the work when offered will mean they won’t get other work or have their hours slashed. But for workers who need to arrange child care or travel such an arrangement can prove stressful and expensive.

“I always know I’ve got two days a week, I always know that, but I don’t know if it’s the Friday or the Saturday. It is always usually the Friday or the Saturday but it’s not usually the same hours, it’s usually either 2 till 6 or 6 till 10.” (Alexis, retail worker)

Evidence of beneficial flexibility is limited. Overall zero hours contracts mean uncertainty and insecurity. Despite similar rights to standard workers, zero-hour contract workers fall behind. A recent TUC poll found:

- **Only 1 in 8 (12%) say they get sick pay.**
- **Only 1 in 14 (7%) would get redundancy pay.**

- **Two-fifths (43%) say they don’t get holiday pay.**
- **Half (47%) say they do not get written terms and conditions.**
- **Just 1 in 20 (5%) say they have the right to a permanent contract after working the same hours consistently.**

“I can’t afford to be ill. That sounds awful but I can’t because it means that I would be getting less money and I can’t manage.” (Angela, hotel worker)

A significant finding was the reluctance of such workers to progress careers within the organisation, perceiving that reward for taking on more responsibilities was not worthwhile. Workers also face limited access to training and learning with wider implications for the labour market.

Together the development of insecure contracts marks a retreat from organisational responsibility to provide jobs that facilitate work-life balance. ■



Professor Sian Moore, one of the researchers in the Low Pay Commission study

The people who brought us the weekend

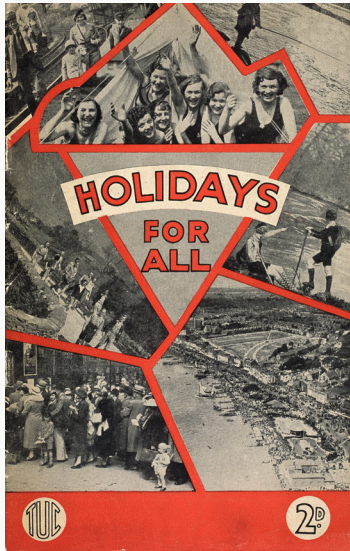
A brief history of working time by **Nigel Costley**

It is believed that before the development of agrarian and capitalist societies people worked less and enjoyed more leisure time.

Farm labourers toiled long hours but according to the seasons. The whole family worked to gather in the harvest.

The industrial revolution brought a sharp increase in working time, especially in the new factories and mills. 12-16 hours a day, six days a week all year around were spent running noisy and dangerous machines. Some Sunday working went on against the strictures of the church. Holidays were Christmas Day and Good Friday.

Emerging trade unions and social reformers won limited rights under a



TUC pamphlet in 1937, estimated that five million employees had won holidays with pay through union negotiated agreements.

series of Factories Acts, mainly to protect women and children. The need to educate children clashed with factory owners who wanted them to work.

Robert Owen, founder of the National Grand Consolidated Union and cooperative champion, led demands for a 10-hour day.

As unions grew they won reductions in working time.

The international movement for the 8-hour day began in Vienna in 1866. This led to the celebration of May Day. It was based on the idea of 8 hours work, 8 hours sleep and 8 hours improvement and recreation.

British unions were divided over whether the 8-hour day should be won through collective bargaining or legislation. This was at a time when most workers did not have a vote.

In 1871 the Bank Holiday Act provided four new public holidays.

In 1896 Forest of Dean MP Charles Dilke took up the cause of shop workers who worked up to 90 hours a week under 'live-in' arrangements. It took deaths in fires in crowded shop accommodation and strikes by shop workers to end the 'live-in' system and eventually win half-day closing to make up for Saturday working.

Unions campaigned for five-day working through industrial and political action. Half-day working on a Saturday was dubbed the

“In 1911 the TUC launched a campaign for paid holidays”



'football stop' as workers wanted time off to watch matches.

In 1908 miners won the eight-hour day and unions reached agreements with employers for reduction in hours and some holidays.

For workers in sectors with weak or no unions Trade Boards were established in 1909 to set minimum pay and maximum hours.

In 1911 the TUC launched a campaign for paid holidays.

In 1938 the Trade Boards gave workers in their sectors one week's paid holiday. This was the first legal right to paid holidays.

In 1945 the Boards were updated to Wages Councils. These were abolished by the Conservatives in 1986 bar for agriculture that ended in 2003.

Well-unionised industries won shorter work time and longer holidays. Industrial cities often had a set fortnight when most factories would close for the annual break.

UK workers lagged behind the rest of Europe with many continent countries passing laws setting 2-3 weeks'

holiday rising to four weeks by the 1980s. In 1980 printing workers won a 37.5 hour week after a very successful campaign of action. Engineering unions built up a big fighting fund to support action to win shorter hours and many industries now close early on Friday as a result.

The EU Working Time Directive set four weeks' annual leave and a maximum 48-hour week in 1993. The UK Conservative government opted out.

In 1998 the new Labour government agreed the EU rules and granted four weeks' paid holidays, the first legal holiday rights for all workers. These are on top of the eight bank holidays.

Workers were allowed to exempt themselves from the 48-hour week maximum and we still work longer hours than the rest of Europe. France set a 35-hour week in 2000. Workers in the Netherlands work an average 21-hour week.

In the surprise 2017 General Election, Jeremy Corbyn announced Labour would introduce three new bank holidays.

At the 2018 TUC Congress Frances O'Grady set a vision for a four-day week to share the benefits of automation with working people. ■

Banner for the eight hour day campaign



Time for a four-day week

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady talks to *West Country Workers* about how unions are dealing with the challenges of a changing workplace ... and makes the case for a four-day working week.

Writing in the 1970s, union leader Clive Jenkins warned new technology would lead to the structural unemployment of more than five million people by 2000.

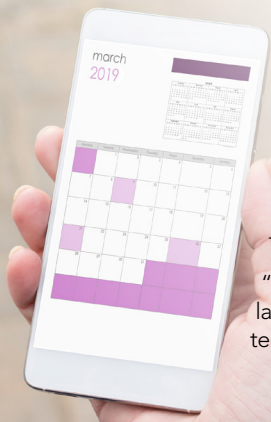
We are now at the brink of a new digital revolution and some fear automation and artificial intelligence will mean the loss of thousands of jobs. Unite warns in its report *The Threat of Automation* that up to 44,424 jobs could be lost to automation in the South West.

But whilst sharing Unite's concerns, the TUC believes new technology could be harnessed to secure higher pay and reduced workloads.

"Workers are having a hard time," says TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady. "They've suffered the longest pay squeeze in 200 years, millions of people are stuck in insecure jobs and stressed out, and too many employers are using technology to treat workers unfairly.

"Bosses and shareholders mustn't be allowed to Hoover up all the gains from new tech for themselves. Working people deserve their fair share – and that means using the gains from new tech to raise pay and allow more time with their families.

"Britain is suffering from a lack of investment in new technology – not too much.



Employers are relying on low wages and insecure jobs to make profits rather than invest in skills and new systems.

"We must get organised like never before to fight for a better alternative and it starts with strong unions.

"In the nineteenth century, unions campaigned for an eight-hour day. In the twentieth century, we won the right to a two-day weekend and paid holidays so, for the twenty-first century, let's lift our ambition again.

"I believe that in this century we can win a four-day working week, with decent pay for everyone."

Reducing working time is a way to share the gains of increased prosperity. Eight in ten workers (81%) want to reduce working time in the future – with 45% of workers opting for a four-day working week, without loss of pay, as new tech makes work more efficient.

The Guardian recently ran a story of a Gloucester business, Radioactive PR, that gave staff a four-day week but paid at their previous five-day salary. The company began with a six-week trial and found that they achieved just as much – and there were even signs of growth.

Other European countries have achieved higher levels of productivity with reduced working hours.

Full time workers in the UK put in some of the longest hours in Europe, behind only Austria and Greece but

we have one of the worst levels of productivity.

And we rack up £32 billion worth of unpaid overtime. The number of people working all seven days of the week has now reached more than 1.4 million.

"Many employers now demand that workers do unpredictable or unsocial hours, or keep staff constantly on standby to work at the demand of an app or text message," says Frances.

"This 'always-on' culture, where workers are on standby without being paid, cuts into time with family and friends and makes it impossible to

plan life outside work. And it's being facilitated by new workplace tech that takes away workers' rights.

"If productivity gains from new technology are even half as good as promised, then the country can afford to make working lives better.

"It's time to share the wealth from new technology, not allow those at the top to grab it for themselves.

"Let's take back control of working time. Ban zero hours. Win two-way flexibility.

"And end exploitation, once and for all. It's time to share the wealth and stop the greed." ■



Frances O'Grady

Learning picks up

Keith Hatch looks at how one union has revived a hub in Wiltshire

© Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk



unionlearn
from the TUC

The Unite learning centre at DHL's Swindon depot was set up in 2007, but after three successful years, interest began to fade away.

Until, that is, branch chair John Bell contacted learning organisers Roy Winter and Andy Hewlett and, together, they approached management to begin turning things around.

"Learning's always been an important part of the union offer at DHL," says John, "but there were a number of issues, including a lack of reliable broadband, that meant that the learning centre closed. But that is changing."

An updated Learning Agreement saw the employer agreeing to give workers release time to attend sessions, and the union providing internet access in the centre.

A launch event attracted around 140 people. All workers (whatever shift they worked) were surveyed

and functional skills and IT were identified as the main areas of interest, though informal adult learning was also popular, in particular digital photography and languages including Greek, Spanish and Italian.

"We've worked hard to get the learning centre back on its feet, and it's now in constant use," smiles Union Learning Rep Netty Vas. "There's a learning committee, made up of the union, management and training providers, which meets monthly to discuss what courses are available to staff – and that's what we're doing!"

The centre is well fitted out with a large number of computers and laptops – allowing staff to access distance learning courses, including health and wellbeing, as well as tutor led learning from Unite's preferred provider, N-Gaged Training.

Rob Franklin is Finance Manager at the DHL site. He says management is happy to work with the union to support skills development. "We have a very diverse, and to some extent unskilled, workforce," he says. "The work we're doing with the union will help give people the skills to improve communication and opportunities at work and Health and Safety awareness.

"As well as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) the

centre is offering IT courses aimed at managers – we share the centre and get to use it when it is not being used as a learning centre. It has been good to work with Unite over the last year and to get things moving again. John and his team of ULRs have been instrumental in taking this forward."

DHL has a 'Warehouse to Wheels' initiative which aims to upskill staff, giving them internal promotion opportunities. They are taking on new drivers all the time and hope to encourage internal applicants through the initiative.

Transport Manager Phil Wilkins says: "We're using the learning centre facilities to give people the chance to get skills such as Excel so they can work in logistics. This is vital as IT

becomes increasingly important with work in logistics."

Some staff can also use the resources to gain management training and improve their opportunities.

Andy Hewlett is pleased with the way the centre has revitalised itself over the last year, saying: "The team has done a fantastic job and I'm really pleased to see the way they are building a learning culture across the workplace.

"We're happy to be working with the local branch and the employer to support learning that benefits everyone there and I'm looking forward to seeing the learning centre continue to develop in the future." ■

Workers at DHL in the Unite Learning Centre



© Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

"We've worked hard to get the learning centre back on its feet, and it's now in constant use"

Poole apprentice network

Nick Hillman and Freya Kendall have won UNISON South West's Young Member of the Year award after helping set up an apprentice learning network at work.

More than 20 apprentices at Poole Borough Council attended a launch event – with lunch paid for with the Union Learning Fund – where, having been told about the benefits of union membership, they all joined UNISON.

Nick (25) and Freya (20) share the UNISON Young Member officer role for their branch and have organised follow-up events including sharing best practice, interview training, CV writing, guest speakers and

the creation of a work shadowing agreement whereby apprentices can shadow other apprentices to gain more experience across a variety of different workplaces.

The group has been learning and developing their organisational skills and at the same time, strengthening their CVs. They have had great feedback from other apprentices who are enjoying meeting up and having 'fun learning' in a different setting. It is relatively early days, but they are very proud of what they have achieved so far.

"We are keen to provide people with a social network beyond their department," says Freya. ■

Nick Hillman and Freya Kendall win UNISON's Young Member of the Year Award



© Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

Football union helps Jack score goals



When Jack Sparkes talks about "goals", it's not immediately obvious whether he's talking about on or off the football pitch, writes Keith Hatch.

For the first year professional at Exeter City FC is impressing in both fields, securing an apprenticeship while training full-time at the Devon club.

"I made my debut at Swindon Town, coming on as a second-half substitute and rattling the outside of the post with a long-range effort with my first touch," he recalls.

"I then scored my first goal later that month in the Checkatrade Trophy against Yeovil Town and it was like a dream come true.

"However, being only 16 and half-way through my GCSE exams I sort of struggled through that period and unfortunately failed my English GCSE. When I then joined Exeter City as a full-time apprentice, I enrolled onto a Level 3 BTEC in Sport, Exercise & Science as all the Scholars had to continue with their education.

"On top of attending college twice a week, I also had to spend half a day after training once a week retaking my English GCSE."

He was supported along the way by the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) Union Learning Fund 'Achievement Through Sport' programme.

"My rep, Jamie Vittles, was excellent in helping to source a tutor who was willing to travel to the training

ground and sit with me for three hours at a time," Jack says.

"Whilst most of the lads would have Wednesdays off I was in training with the first team in the morning and then doing the bit extra on my English retake in the afternoon.

"The days could be long but we have senior professionals who either have a degree or enrolled on an Open University course via the PFA so it was important that I excel off the pitch as well as on it."

Jamie Vittles, Head of Exeter City Community Trust and long-standing ULR, says: "We've created an environment that encourages education. In Jack's case, his priority is his football but he's surrounded by educated players who know the importance of spending their time wisely. It was no coincidence Jack's the only apprentice in his age group to get a professional contract, he's a bright lad."

"It's always good to see young players balancing their football and education," says PFA education advisor Riz Rehman. "Jack is already talking to his ULR and the wider education team at the PFA to enrol onto an Open University course." ■

"My rep, Jamie Vittles, was excellent in helping to source a tutor who was willing to travel to the training ground"

Education comes home



Last autumn saw a welcome return to the West Country for Alison Foster.

By Tim Lezard.

Former TUC tutor Alison Foster is a regular visitor to Glastonbury Festival, and spent many happy summers in a caravan in a friend's field in Somerset.

Now she's back in the West and already making waves as the new course co-ordinator for trade union studies at City of Bristol College.

"The opportunity to re-establish a centre here was a challenge I couldn't

resist," she says. "I'd been doing a similar job in London for eleven years and before that a TUC tutor for nine years and wanted to bring those skills and knowledge to Bristol.

"I know how to recruit, I'm a people person, I know how to engage people and, importantly, I know how colleges work, with all their paperwork and procedures."

Alison has already started running courses in Bristol, with the aim of spreading them across the region throughout 2019.

"I'm going to slowly try and make sure there's TUC provision in every single area in the South West, so people don't have to travel to Bristol," she says.

"I want to build confidence in City of Bristol College, that courses will be

"Even though the law says you shouldn't be unfairly dismissed, every day people are because they don't have trade union representation"

delivered and delivered well. I want to build relationships with local trade unions and, of course, with the TUC."

The college offers a range of courses, including health and safety, communication skills and how to recruit – and represent – members at work.

"These courses are really important because if people don't have trade union representation at work, where there are areas that aren't unionised, you find weak points where employers

can attack you and your rights," she says.

"If there's no-one to speak up, and the employer wants to change you terms and conditions, or dismiss someone, then even though the law might say someone can't be unlawfully dismissed, who do you get the support from?"

"Even though the law says you shouldn't be unfairly dismissed, every day people are because they don't have trade union representation." ■



Alison Foster

Photo: Tim Lezard

How do I get on a course?

Anyone who is a member of a TUC-affiliated union is entitled to join a course. You can find your nearest courses here

www.tuceducation.org.uk/findacourse

Individuals are expected to receive the backing of their union to join a course, as well as being released by their employer to attend lessons.

Courses are free for TU reps.



TUC South West

Young leaders

A training programme for young trade unionists

For details contact:
southwest@tuc.org.uk

Tale of two Plymouth women

The bombing of Plymouth during World War II brought together two women with very different backgrounds and political views, writes Nigel Costley.

Nancy Astor, a wealthy, well-connected American with right-wing views, was the first woman to take a seat in Parliament after being elected MP for Plymouth Sutton in 1919.

Nancy moved to England in 1904 to marry wealthy politician Waldorf Astor. He was the Tory MP for Plymouth Sutton but had to give up his seat when he inherited his father's title of Viscount Astor. Nancy stood in his place and won the by-election in 1919, beating the Liberal Isaac Foot, the father of Michael Foot.

When she entered the House of Commons Winston Churchill compared her arrival with someone intruding into his bathroom.

Her strong religious views were anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic. She knew little of the working people of Plymouth but had a quick wit and casual style that won her support. She was not involved in the suffragette movement but they organised a gathering to welcome her to Parliament.

Kate Spurrell, dubbed 'Red Kate', was accused of preaching communism. Born in Devonport she was a socialist activist without the advantages of wealth. She was elected to the executive of the NUT, serving as its president in 1922.

She was active in support of the General Strike, speaking at rallies and raising funds. She stood unsuccessfully for Labour in Totnes in 1929 and in 1935 for the left-wing Independent Labour Party in Camborne.

Nancy Astor



Kate Spurrell



She argued against the Nazis whereas Astor supported appeasement with Germany and in 1939 Bristol East Labour MP Stafford Cripps called her the "Member for Berlin".

When war broke out Astor admitted mistakes but made a number of rather incoherent speeches in Parliament. But in Plymouth she played a heroic part during the

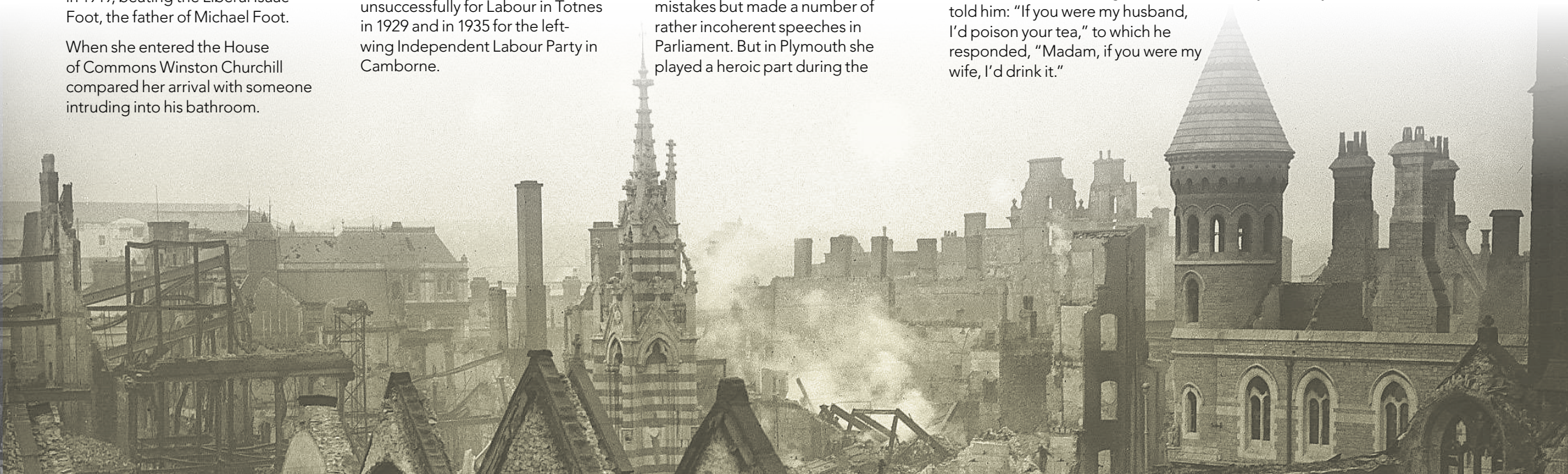
"Nancy Astor, a wealthy, well-connected American with right-wing views, was the first woman to take a seat in Parliament after being elected MP for Plymouth Sutton in 1919."

bombing of the city. The city centre was devastated and Spurrell asked Astor for help in evacuating children. The two worked together and a lasting friendship was formed.

Astor's marriage fell apart and with her increasing unpopularity in Parliament she was persuaded not to stand again. Astor and the Tory leader, Churchill, never got on. She told him: "If you were my husband, I'd poison your tea," to which he responded, "Madam, if you were my wife, I'd drink it."

Spurrell was a local champion for children and education. She officially opened the nursery centre at Dartington Hall in 1942.

Astor's health deteriorated and she led a lonely life until she died in 1964. When she woke briefly during her last illness and found all her family around her bedside she asked: "Am I dying or is this my birthday?" ■



Maureen MBE

Long-standing Usdaw rep Maureen Loxley was awarded an MBE in the New Year honours list.

The Gloucester-based Tesco worker was in a state of shock when she opened the letter telling her of the award.

"I thought: 'Oh my God, this ain't real!'" she told *West Country Workers*. "I pinched myself. I thought they'd made a mistake. Then, when I realised it was true, I had to keep it zipped for weeks! I was ecstatic and wanted to share it, but knew I couldn't."

When she was finally allowed to tell people, her phone was red hot. "I still couldn't believe it, but then I looked at news websites and there it was, there was my name," she says.

"I was on leave that day but the other half went into work and he said it was buzzing in there, everyone was talking about it.

"I don't know who nominated me, but I'll do some digging and find out ... and thank them."

Maureen received the award in recognition of services to the retail sector and trade unions. She has been an Usdaw member for 38 years, joining not long after she arrived in the UK from Jamaica. She has served on the South West TUC executive.

Her general secretary Paddy Lillis, who served alongside Maureen on the South West TUC executive, said: "We are very proud that one of our longest serving reps and prominent activists has received this prestigious award. We congratulate Maureen on her achievement and thank her for the years of service she has given to Usdaw and our members.

"Maureen is a first class example of what thousands of volunteers are achieving in their workplaces across the country and she thoroughly deserves this recognition." ■

Photo: Clint Randall

Oliver Trevett RIP



South West TUC regional secretary Nigel Costley has paid tribute to long-standing Tolpuddle resident Oliver Trevett who died early in the New year.

Nigel said: "Oliver had not been well for some time and last year was the first festival he missed for much of his life. He was a stalwart for agricultural trade unionism and chaired the Dorset Committee for many years.

"He was a stout defender of the cause even as the numbers employed in farming declined and as the agricultural sector became absorbed into the TGWU and then Unite. Oliver was a great protector of the memory of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. RIP" ■

Eddi Reader to star at Tolpuddle



Former Fairground Attraction singer Eddi Reader is playing this year's Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival.

The annual Dorset event takes place between July 19 and 21, and will also feature Louisiana Cajun star Sarah Savoy, Mexican ska band Los De Abojo and Northern Ireland punk rockers Wood Burning Savages, as well as the usual selection of poetry, theatre and politics.

Tickets go on sale on April 1 www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk ■



Petroc college signs charter

Petroc, the Devon college, has agreed to sign the TUC's Dying to Work Charter. This gives assurance to workers who face a terminal illness that they will be supported in work. Nigel Costley, South West TUC Regional Secretary signs alongside representatives from the college management and trade unions. ■

All TUC publications may be made available for dyslexic or visually impaired readers, on request, in an agreed electronic format or in accessible formats such as Braille, audio tape and large print, at no extra cost. Contact the South West TUC on 0117 947 0521.

Designed by Rumba www.rumbadesign.co.uk

ISBN: 978-1-911288-47-3