



Plymouth & District Trade Union Council

Minutes of Meeting held on Wednesday 7th May 2008 held at the T&G Unite Offices, Plymouth.

1. **Present:** Paul Staddon PCS; Diana Beal Treasurer/T&G Unite; Neil Young Chair/NUJ; Tony Staunton Asst.Secretary/T&G Unite; Dave Franklin Vice Chair/PCS; Paddy Ryan Pensioners/TGWU; Chris Bligh RMT; Robin Beale TGWU ; Chris Webb CWU; Jeremy Guise Secretary/UNISON
2. **Apologies:** Tom Jeffery USDAW; Kevin Treweeks UNISON; Dave Uren AMICUS/Unite; Steve Peach President; Hayley Kemp PSC; Alison Smith NUS; Danny Bouch CWU
3. **Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 2nd April 2008**, were considered for accuracy and **Approved**. The following **Matters Arising** were then taken:
 - 3.1. **Stop the War Coalition:** The Chair asked the meeting to note the Campaign against the Arms Trade, with recent media coverage of bribery and corruption by UK based manufacturers. Following discussion the report was **noted** with concern.
 - 3.2. **Defend Council Housing in Plymouth:** DB reported following the Council election results last week, with the Tories gaining further seats and consolidating their plans. They have shown resistance to the inclusion of trade unions on the Board of the new Housing Association. DB has asked Belinda Pascoe for the Area Plan for the new organisation to see what land is being transferred and identify what will be done – sell-off and profit? The Ballot is to be held in October, yet no plans are revealed for the future of Council staff, what is transferring and staying in the Council, etc. **In discussion**, NY spoke of the tendency for the Council to hold these meetings *in camera*, secretly to avoid scrutiny. It was **agreed** to continue to support there being trade union seats on the Board.
 - 3.3. **Tolpuddle Festival:** it was **agreed** to hire a coach and publicise the day trip to the *Tolpuddle Festival*. Leaflets were circulated.
 - 3.4. **Attack on Trade Unionists:** TS spoke of his situation and that of other left wing activists who are currently the subject of witchhunts by employers and/or trade union machines. TS represented himself at the Certification Officer Tribunal earlier this year, where he was challenging UNISON's decision to exclude him from national elections in 2007 despite no outcome of the internal disciplinary hearing against him. A result is expected in 2 weeks time. TS is currently being sued by UNISON for £15,000 for breach of Trust despite having been expelled from the union and having returned the contested computers, without prejudice. It has been suggested that this is the first time in the history of the union movement that an activist has been sued in this way. He

also outlined the case of Yunus Bahksh, who is facing the sack at the hands of the Mental Health Trust in Newcastle, where he works as a mental health nurse and has been the Secretary of the UNISON Health Branch and a national elected official for a number of years. He has been suspended from work since September 2006 and is now signed-off sick with depression. Charges against him revolve around anonymised letters of complaint that are said to emanate from elected UNISON officers. He is also facing disciplinary action by UNISON, and has been debarred from standing in the national and local UNISON elections this year. **In discussion**, JG reported from today's successful lobby of Parliament which he attended in support of Karen Reissman who was sacked by Manchester Community Health Trust for campaigning against privatisation as an elected officer of the union. UNISON has rescinded their decision that she was no longer a member and is challenging her sacking, but the union has maintained that she cannot stand in this year's national union elections despite full membership and being in full-time work. PR expressed support and identified the need to expose political corruption inside our own movement. CW offered support and agreed to take the issues back to his Branch. DB identified local tensions that are the result of the national pressure to shut down opposition and questioning. She considered other local activists as being targeted, too. NY **proposed** the following motion to the next SW TUC Council, **seconded** by DB:

This trade union body expresses the utmost concern at recent and ongoing attacks upon leading left-wing trade union activists by their own unions. We believe there is a concerted attempt to isolate and expel those on the Left still ready to challenge New Labour Government policies and call for workers collective industrial action against pay cuts, privatisation and job losses. We believe it is the duty of trade unions to defend their members, their jobs, pay and services, even when this brings us into conflict with a Labour Government. We therefore resolve to:

1. call for the end of attacks on critics of New Labour within our Movement, and
2. offer full support, including financial support towards legal defence campaigns, to Karen Reissman in Manchester, Yunus Bahksh in Newcastle, and our own Tony Staunton of Plymouth Trades Council.

Following further debate the motion was **put to the vote and agreed**, 9 for, 0 against, 1 abstention. The motion will go forward to SWTUC.

- 3.5. Plymouth City Council Job Evaluation:** DB reported that UNISON has voted against the current Job Evaluation, with GMB and T&GWU narrowly voting in favour. The three unions have to ensure a collective stand with the employer, and are therefore supporting the UNISON vote and calling for renegotiation of the Deal, followed by a further Ballot of the entire membership on any fresh offer. **Noted.**

4. Officers Reports:

4.1. Chair: NY stated his activities are incorporated in following agenda items.

4.2. Secretary: The Secretary recorded his thanks to all the hard work offered by Council members at the May Day Festival.

4.3. Treasurer: DB offered a verbal report and promised to present a full printed report to the next meeting. It was **agreed** to fund the additional name tags to bring the Presidential chain of office up-to-date at a cost of no more than £250, and to get quotes for the new banner from specialists in London.

4.4. Delegates to external Bodies:

4.4.1. Climate Change: TS spoke of the Typhoon that hit Burma at the weekend, as another example of the extreme weather patterns fast developing globally. In terms of climate science the event is on a par with Hurricane Katrina I 2006 and has recorded devastation and death at least twice the extent of the Aceh Tsunami in Indonesia last year. There is no time to lose in developing collective solutions to harsh reductions in carbon emissions. He will be attending the TUC national Conference on 16th June in London, and proposed:

1. A Public Meeting hosted by PTUC on Climate Change, with a £25 sponsorship
2. Support for transport from Plymouth to the mass demonstration against the third runway at Heathrow, on Saturday 31st May, called by the Campaign against Climate Change, with a donation of £25 towards costs.

Seconded by CW, who spoke of the need and value to encourage green workplace “environmental” reps. **In discussion**, DB identified the need for union reps to be more informed of the issues, and acknowledged TS as the *Unite* branch’s environmental rep. with specialist knowledge on the subject.

The motion was put to the vote and carried unanimously.

4.4.2. Pensioners: PR spoke passionately against new proposals against the unemployed and benefit claimants, with eye-retina recognition technology and tighter checks that will discourage many of the poorest from claiming their rights. PR proposed the following motion:

This trade union body opposes any measure that weakens the rights of benefits claimants and all attempts to undermine access to benefits by workers. We **resolve to**

1. campaign against further attacks and intimidatory measures, such as retinal scans and lie detectors on the claimants, which could discourage claimants from coming forward, and
2. Oppose current proposals as a concerted attack on the integrity of the national social security system.

In discussion, DB spoke of the lack of adherence to procedures and reliance on the discretion of individual counter staff to decide levels of claim. The motion was **put to the vote and carried unanimously.**

5. May Day Festival: TS offered an evaluation of the event, with 400 people coming through the doors, mainly under 30 years old, but without widespread support from trade unionists in the City. In national terms, the event was successful initiative by a trades council, and we should develop and sustain the vision of *Trade Unions for a Sustainable Future*. **In discussion**, NY spoke against use of the Guildhall as too large and clanky. DB emphasised the short amount of time given to organise the event, and explained the need to raise at least £3,000 over the next year, and make the event more commercial. JG agreed, but felt the Guildhall is excellent value for money. DF argued that the event has to happen locally but it is a big and challenging undertaking. The synthesis of the music and the politics made it successful, particularly given the competition of the Jazz Festival and the Boating Show both happening on the Hoe and Barbican at the same time. We need to be more systematic and planned, and shift the barrier to include union sponsors such as *Frizzells* and

Thompsons in order to raise money. RB spoke of the need for commercial planning of the event. CW said we need to target the audience, and then provide attract live entertainment. A formal **vote of thanks** was offered to Pete Heddle for organising the bands and TS for initiating and co-ordinating the event. It was **agreed** to create a PTUC May Day Sub-Committee immediately to meet no less than monthly and begin fundraising now. It was **further agreed** that the Trades Council should seek to hold stalls at the forthcoming local festivals throughout the summer, such as Plymouth Pride (6th June), Freedom Fields and RESPECT.

6. Local Government Elections:

6.1. Plymouth Public Services Alliance Public Meeting: PS presented written reports on the Public Meeting and the Question Time event. The reports were gratefully received and considered. Paul was **thanked formally** for his organising skills and hard work in preparing and chairing the Question Time meeting. **In discussion** JG acknowledged the events as small but positive initiatives, with trade unions holding local councillors to account representing an important message and reminder to the City's politicians.

6.2. Unite Against Fascism: JG thanked delegates for their help with the leafleting organised by *Unite Against Fascism*, and acknowledged that the BNP were held in check in the City, with Southway representing a lower vote from a higher poll than a year ago, and the Waterfront Ward seeing the BNP disappointed by the 8% poll. On a national level, the growth of the far right represents a serious threat.

7. Motion:

7.1. Nuclear Power work in the Dockyard:

The following motion was submitted by *City of Plymouth UNISON*, Proposed by JG, seconded by CB:

This Trade Union Council is concerned about the prospect of using the skilled resources of the dockyard to make equipment for a new generation of nuclear power stations. It believes that such civil nuclear work will reinforce the military nuclear work of the dockyard to the detriment of the city and surrounding area. It notes that the dockyard has significant potential to provide equipment for sustainable power generation.

1. Support campaigns against the manufacture of civil and military nuclear equipment in the dockyard;
2. To seek an urgent review of how the dockyard can be converted to the production of sustainable energy equipment.

In debate JG explained the authorities are struggling to keep a role for the dockyard in the City, and looking to nuclear storage and decommissioning as a core part of the work, causing increased pollution and low-wage impoverishment in the City. PS asked the mover where the information is coming from, and whether the civilian workforce of *Babcock Marine* are the target of the motion in terms of transferring work to civil engineering for sustainable energy production. DB stated she does not support nuclear activity but has to balance the issue of the future of the dockyard with the livelihood of many low-paid workers across the site. TS explained the concept of the "*Alternative Economic Strategy*" first explored by the *Lucas Aerospace* unions in Bristol in the 1980s, as moving the site away from military industrial plant to civil engineering to meet the crying needs of the challenge to reduce carbon emissions. This is not a motion to close the dockyard and sack workers, but to transfer and develop the dockyard that will enhance and preserve employment there, and offer a future to the City. The need to challenge traditional work and move forward to new employment types will be

a growing feature in response to climate change, and unions cannot stay static and conservative in defence of current jobs when the world is changing dramatically and rapidly. NY spoke of the real issue of the Dockyard being generally seen as having no economic future in it's current form, and the choice is between allowing Plymouth to become a nuclear dumping ground and graveyard, or proposing and campaigning for new and essential civilian industry. CB spoke of the need to support the motion for the future of the City. RB spoke of his need to represent and support the workers in the Dockyard. PS agreed but explained his decision to abstain on the basis that their Branch had long considered alternative strategies for future work at the Dockyard. Following further debate the motion was **put to the vote** and carried 6 for, 1 against and 3 abstentions.

8. Class Struggle:

8.1. Rail catering: CB reported on the contraction of rail catering in Cornwall and the South West, with jobs being lost and growing confrontation between employers and the rail unions. The Council **agreed** support to the unions concerned.

9. Any Other Business:

There was no time for other business.

10. Date of Next Meeting:

**Wednesday 4th June 2008, at 7:15 at the T&G
Unite District Offices, Plymouth Bretonside.**

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