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Plymouth & District Trades Union Council

Minutes

of Council Meeting at 7.45pm (starting immediately after the Annual General Meeting) on 4th March 2009

At the Unite (formerly T&G) offices, Sutton Harbour.

- 1. Present:** Kevin Treweeks (UNISON); Tony Staunton (TGWU Unite); Neil Young (FoC NUJ); Chris Webb (CWU Area Representative); Rob Rooney (UNISON); Pat Ryan (NATE/Pensioners Forum); Dave Uren (AMICUS Unite); Darren Turner (UNISON); Neal Harrington (UNISON); Alison Smith (NUS UPSU); Paul Staddon (PCS); Barry Gomery (Unite); Tom Jeffery (USDAW); Robin Beale (Unite); Diana Beal (Unite); Jeremy Guise (UNISON); Dave Franklin (PCS);
- 2. Apologies:** Sylvia Brice (USDAW)

- 3. Minutes of the meeting held on 4th February 2009** were agreed as a correct record and the following Matters Arising Taken:

3.1 Item 3.1. Stop the War –

3.1.1. Gaza: Support for Students: AS reported on the Student occupation of the technology Building at Plymouth University, where demands were put forward over 4 days for Plymouth University to support students in Gaza and condemn the Human Rights abuses. Students also called for the University to end investments with British Aerospace (BAe) who supply the F16 fighters to Israel. The University agreed to support 6 scholarships for students from Gaza, a huge success. Over 30 colleges have held similar occupations nationally, and a new mood of student radicalism appears to be growing. Locally, the campaign continues. She thanked delegates from Trades Council for supporting and attending the occupation and other student activities. **In discussion**, DF explained the role of Trades Council members during the campaign. KT circulated the report from the latest TU delegation to the West Bank. The meeting **agreed** full support for the student's actions.

3.1.2. Iran: Motion re current situation: The following motion was received and **proposed** by TS:

Plymouth Trade Union Council notes

- 1) with approval Barack Obama's offer to talk with Iran without preconditions but is concerned that he, alongside Gordon Brown, has not ruled out a military attack on Iran.
- 2) that the lifting of US and UN sanctions that are hurting ordinary people in Iran and are damaging their economic and civil institutions will not be part of these negotiations.
- 3) with unease at Gordon Brown's call for tougher sanctions on Iran and reports that US sanctions could be extended by the new Obama administration
- 4) the devastating consequences of sanctions on Iraq in the 1990s – the deaths of a UNICEF-estimated half a million children
- 5) that the IAEA has found no evidence of a "weaponisation programme" in Iran and the National Intelligence Estimate, the grouping of US intelligent agencies, has estimated that Iran would be at least 10 years away from obtaining a nuclear weapon should it decide to follow this path.
- 6) that the leaders of Iran's vibrant democracy movement, which includes trade unionists, opposes sanctions, foreign state interference and military intervention in Iran which would seriously damage their quest for positive change.

Plymouth Trade Union Council resolves:

- 1) To call on the US and British governments to publicly rule out a military attack on Iran and to withdraw any sanctions against Iran.
- 2) To express solidarity with trade unionists and other democracy activists in Iran.
- 3) to support Campaign Iran in its activities against an attack on Iran and increasing links with democracy activists inside Iran by affiliating to the campaign.
- 4) To send this motion, suitably reworded, to South West TUC.

Seconded by AS. TS explained that the Campaign Iran is an Iran-focused anti-war group campaigning against an attack on Iran that is affiliated to the Stop The War Coalition. It is lead by British Iranians (including students, trade unionists and academics) and has solid links with the democracy movement in Iran. Platform speakers from the Iranian democracy movement have in the past included the high-profile human rights lawyer and activist Shirin Ebadi, Marzieh Langroudi (from anti-war Mothers for Peace) and journalist Mashallah Shamsolvaezin, spokesperson for Association of Press Freedom (Iran).

Backed by Britain, the US government's threats to Iran have only worked to erect barriers to change in Iran. The Iranian government has already used the threats of an attack on Iran to crack down on internal opposition (including trade unionists) by accusing them of being foreign agents. Therefore if the US and British governments publicly rule out a military attack on Iran and remove the crippling sanctions it can ease the pressure on trade unionists and other democracy activists and greatly aid the cause of change in Iran.

In debate, KT suggested this was a poor timing for a motion to be circulated given the current apparent climate of negotiation and reconciliation. He would not support a motion that would lead nowhere. Following further debate the motion was **put to the vote** and **Carried**: 13 for, 1 against, 3 abstentions.

3.1.3. G20 Demonstrations: 28th, 1st and 2nd April, London:

TS explained that President Obama was to arrive in London on 1st April, following the start of the G20 crisis summit there. The TUC and leading Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) have organised a major demonstration on Saturday 28th March

supported by all leading trade unions. The Stop the War Coalition and other groups have called demonstrations for 1st and 2nd April in London to call for Peace and social justice, and the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. This Trades Council has already supported the 28th and the 2nd and sought to organise transport, and the protest on the 1st has been called since the last Council. He **proposed** additional support for the 1st, **seconded by DF. In debate**, DU explained that Andy McDowell for *Unite* may run coaches for the 28th from across South West according to demand. DB suggested we that trade unionists could fill a coach from Plymouth. JG explained UNISON have organised coaches for UNISON members-only for the 28th. There should be better co-ordination. He will ask UNISON to extend the invitation to other trade unionists. RR explained the 2nd April demonstration will be huge and should also have transport. TS explained the role of the Trades Council was to encourage branch campaigns, and it was for branches to fund transport and other activities as the Trades Council had insufficient income to do so. Following further discussion **it was agreed** to seek a single coach for all trade unions and supporters from Plymouth for the 28th, and to support transport to London for 2nd April.

3.1.4. Strasbourg Europe-wide protest against NATO: TS explained the previous meeting had agreed to send a delegation, and he had reserved 6 places on the London to Strasbourg campaign coaches leaving London Victoria at 9am on Friday 3rd April and returning on Sunday 5th. He had also reserved 3 double rooms at a cheap hotel in Strasbourg for the 3rd and 4th. Costs were £80 coach, £65 hotel per delegate, to be self-funded or funded by individual TU Branches. So far 4 places had been reserved. The plan was for Plymouth delegation to travel to London Thursday 2nd for the protest that day, sleep on floors overnight and travel on to Strasbourg, making their own way back from London on Sunday night/Monday morning. TJ suggested he would consider joining the delegation.

3.1.5. CND: Stop the Dump at Devonport Dockyard! TS circulated copies of the *Evening Herald* and *Western Morning News* identifying the sawing-up of nuclear reactor cores at Devonport Dockyard, contrary to the public consultation called ISOLUS and in secret. He proposed the following motion:

Plymouth Devonport

Plymouth Trade Union Council recognises the link between nuclear weaponry, the British nuclear fleet and the resulting highly toxic nuclear waste for which there is no safe storage solution. We object and protest in the strongest possible terms against the plan to locate a private facility for the on-site storage of nuclear waste near the quayside of Plymouth Devonport Naval Dockyard, adjacent to high density residential areas and two primary schools. This latest development adds to our historic call for the closure of all nuclear facilities at Plymouth Devonport, and the scrapping of Trident and the naval nuclear fleet. We call on all campaigns associated with Peace and Social Justice to join with CND in a mass campaign against the facility, and **resolve to:**

1. Support the CND campaign against the nuclear dump at Devonport;
2. Formally approach national Peace and Environmental groups to ask for formal and practical support for the Campaign;

3. Formally approach all national trade unions associated with the nuclear facilities to ask for their understanding and support for the Campaign, which, whilst opposing the creation of new jobs associated with the construction and operation of the Nuclear Waste Facility, is primarily concerned with the risks to health, safety and long-term economy of the City of Plymouth.
4. Support and promote the National CND demonstration at Plymouth Devonport called for Saturday 31st October 2009.
5. Continue to call for the closure of all nuclear facilities at Plymouth Devonport.
6. Place this motion, suitably reworded, to CND National Council and SW TUC Regional Council.

The motion was seconded by RR, who reminded the meeting that the nuclear facility is owned and run by the private company, *Babcock Marine*, for profit. The nuclear Dump was to be another profit-making exercise at the expense of local people. **In debate**, NY spoke of the significant numbers of Plymouth residents who logged their opposition to a nuclear waste storage facility at the Dockyard during the Government's ISOLUS Consultation in the City, and how this secret exercise by the MoD had proved they take no notice of public opinion, wishes or concerns. JG spoke of the further impoverishment of the City, as the nuclear dump equivalent of Hartlepool, by the Dockyard. Far from creating or saving jobs, this would further push regeneration and incoming industry away from the area. Following further discussion the motion was **put to the vote** and **carried Unanimously**.

3.2. Defend Council Housing

3.2.1 House of Commons Enquiry 25th February 2009: TS reported on the campaign action in London 25th February 2009 where 200 delegates packed Committee Rooms to express concerns at the housing crisis and effects of externalisation of council housing. The speakers damned the Government's so-called "subsidy system" which is taking vast sums of money from council tenants' rent accounts. He called on TU Branches to offer support for Early ay Motion 355 calling for new investment in building new council housing.

3.2.2. Update on current Plymouth Council process: DB reported the Plymouth Community Homes set-up deadline is October 1st, with company registration proceeding. Corporate Impact Groups are meeting within the Council, with DB, DT and KT sitting on the groups. Terms & Conditions of the workforce are being changed in advance of the transfer, but Unions have complained at a lack of proper and formal consultation. She argued that all council unions should oppose all changes to terms and conditions ahead of transfer, and that TUPE should be applied immediately.

3.3. re: Item 6.1. Media Campaign: NUJ / Unite: NY reported on the campaign meeting held under the auspices of this Trade Union Council as a result of the decisions made at the last Council meeting. The campaign to defend the Media has been established, with a programme of action supporting a national campaign to protest jobs and standards of journalism. **In discussion**, it was recognised that the local owners, *Northcliffe*, are the most hostile of any media company

towards trade unions. There are predictions of closure of newspapers and other media outlets, with the just-announced downsizing and 650 job cuts within ITV being the latest example. **In discussion**, TS asked for help in a period of leafleting of the Western Daily Press building at Derriford later this month, early mornings and early evenings, to advance the TU recruitment campaign in the local media towards a longer-term plan of action in defence of jobs and standards. Following further discussion, the meeting **agreed** to formally support the local campaign with all resources of the Council, and support the current disputes and strike action at the *Yorkshire Evening Post* and *Cambridge University Press*, with messages of support.

3.4. re: Item 7.1. Anti-Academies Alliance: NH spoke of the local Campaign, now established as *Hands Off Plymouth Schools (HOPS)* with a new website coming on line this month. News is coming out that the Plymouth City Council has sold current schools down the river in the hope of winning Government cash for private development of new schools. He reminded the meeting that the new Academies can select students and curriculum, and staff conditions of service and pay. John Kitto has just received a positive *Ofsted* Report, but remains at risk of being handed-over to a church-based consortium. NH asked for a group of names from unions who can speak when media contacts the group. Until the consultations start, including the proposals on the "sponsors" for the new schools, it will be difficult to respond. The meeting **agreed** for public statement and correspondence to challenge local MPs and Councillors to explain their actions.

4. Officer Reports

4.1 Chair: No further Report as full report offered at preceding AGM

4.2 Secretary: No further Report as full report offered at preceding AGM.

4.2.1. Minutes: to be circulated by e-mail as well as Royal Mail in future, if delegates give TS their preferred e-mail address..

4.2.2. PTUC WebSite: Noted with thanks to TS and DF.

4.3 Treasurer: No further Report as full report offered at preceding AGM.

4.4. Climate Change – TS expressed grave concern at the backward momentum of trade unions around the issue of Climate Change, which will do more than the recession to destroy the economy, jobs and livelihoods unless we act. He reported on arrangements for

- CCC National TU Conference 7th April, where 3 PTUC delegates are attending. TS is part of the organising Committee and is chairing workshops.
- TUC National Conference 27th April: the meeting **agreed** to support.
- CACC National Protest Saturday 12th December 2009. London. The Council **agreed** to formally support the London demonstration, with transport.

4.5. Students & Young Workers: AS added to her report the Plymouth Uni students occupations, and reported that UCU at Plymouth University has formally agreed no compulsory redundancies

of Academic Staff, but administrative staff are still under threat. The University management has also refused to agree a Pay Deal, so industrial action may still take place

4.6 Pensioners Forum: Pat Ryan reported the official pension level is £90:47 a week, with pensioners suffering. The cold spell saw large numbers of deaths through mainly strokes due to inability to stay warm enough. The forum continues to argue for large pensions increase. The Devon pensioners Forum lobbied the local Council in protest against council Tax increases, but unfortunately argued for a lowering of Council expenditure rather than increased rants from central government. Workers are losing their jobs because of Council cuts, and Pensioners should be seen to support the workers and services they produce.

In discussion, JG spoke of the scapegoating of pensioners in terms of costs of free bus passes, etc. TJ reminded the meeting of time-restrictions on the periods when pensioners can and cannot ride free. The Chair propose a letter to the Council campaigning at this, and asking for train concessions in additions to unrestricted bus passes.

5. May Day Festival – DF reported on current progress with the festival. Major issues of funding continue, with Branch donations still in question. We are committed to expenditure of over £3k on the evening gig, and £2k on the daytime Free Festival. **In discussion,** RR asked for details of stall bookings. DT confirmed that UNISON will donate £1,000 plus public liability insurance for the Guildhall, and run a stall at the event. CW agreed to ask Tony Kearnes to attend. TS called for early booking of stalls, which cost £25 for funded organisations (other than TU Branches who have financially sponsored the event, who get free stalls and campaign space).
Next meeting 7pm Tuesday 10th March at 124 Devonport Road.

6. Motions

6.1. Defend Himen Abas: Plymouth Trades Union Council is concerned to learn of the detention with a view to deportation to Iraq of Himen Abas, a popular member of the Kurdish community in Plymouth We believe that Himen, who is a communist, could be killed in Iraq for his political beliefs. We support the campaign to stop his deportation and encourage trade unionists and the wider public to sign the petition to Devonport MP, Alison Seabeck.
END

Proposed by NY, who explained the plight of HA who had been taken from his home to a detention centre. **Seconded** by TS. **In discussion,** it was confirmed that Plymouth's Kurdish community are supporting the campaign for Himen's release, with an amendment accepted to further agree the forwarding the motion to Alison Seabeck MP and the TUC South West Region.

Following discussion the motion was **put to the vote** and **Carried Unanimously.**

6.2. People's Charter:

Plymouth & District Trade Union Council supports, adopts and recommends the newly published People's Charter, including:

“A Charter for Change!

Britain is in the grip of an economic crisis. So is the world.

Every time there is a slump the politicians and financiers seem mystified as to how the system has failed. But boom and bust is the way it works. It's not stable. When the economy grows, banks, corporations and speculators, driven only by greed, gamble other people's money in their global casino. When they lose 'confidence' in their profit making schemes and panic, the bubble bursts and we pay the price.

Redundancies throw hundreds of thousands on to the dole. Savings are lost. Homes are repossessed. Pensions lose value. Workers are put on short time. Wages and conditions are cut. Public services are slashed.

Government is spending billions of pounds of our money bailing the banks and big business out of their crisis.

Its not right and we didn't vote for it.

Those £billions are our money. And our children's. We want that money better spent.

We support the new *People's Charter*. It sets out what must be done to get out of this crisis and put the people first, before the interests of bankers and speculators.

We need one million signatures to show we mean business. So sign and support the Charter - on line, at work, in your community.

Together we can get the changes we need. Can we do it? Yes we can!

A fair economy for a fairer Britain. Take the leading banking, insurance and mortgage industries fully into democratic public ownership run for the benefit of all. Regain control of the Bank of England and keep interest rates low. Tightly regulate the City markets to facilitate lending and to stop speculation and takeovers against the public interest. Ban hedge funds, raids on pension funds, asset-stripping and corporate tax loopholes. Restructure the tax system so big business and the wealthy pay more and ordinary people pay less.

More and better jobs. Existing jobs must be protected. Public and private investment must create new jobs paying decent money. In particular in manufacturing, construction and green technology. More jobs mean more spending power to stimulate the economy, increased tax revenue and fewer people on benefit. Build full employment. Reduce hours, not pay, to create more jobs. Raise the minimum wage to half national median earnings and end the lower rate for young workers.

Decent homes for all. Stop the repossessions and keep people in their homes. Offer 'no interest' loans. Control rents. We need 3 million new homes. Give local government the power and money to build and renovate affordable quality homes and buy empty ones, ending the housing shortage, and creating jobs.

Protect and improve our public services – no cuts. Save public money: bring energy, transport, water, post and telecommunications back into public ownership. End corporate profiteering in health, education, social and other public services. Stop the EU privatisation Directives.

Fairness and Justice. Free heating and transport for every pensioner. Link state pensions and benefits to average earnings. Protect pension schemes and restore the lost value of private pensions. End child poverty by increasing child benefits and tax credits and providing free nurseries and crèches. Enforce equal pay for women. End racism and discrimination in all its forms. No scapegoating of migrant workers. Invest in young people and give them a real stake in the future. Provide youth, community, arts and cultural centres, sports facilities, and clubs for all. Guarantee training, apprenticeships and education with grants for everyone and no fees.

Restore union rights to allow them the freedom to fight the crisis and to protect workers.

Build a secure and sustainable future for all.

End the cost of war in blood and money. Bring our troops home. Don't waste £billions on a new generation of nuclear weapons. And beyond the current economic disaster, climate change threatens us all. Our future must be based on massive investment for a greener, safer world now. Debt is crushing millions of people forcing them to move and producing war, famine and misery. Get rid of the debt economy in Britain and cancel the debts of the poor of the planet.

A better future for all the people of the world.”

Plymouth TUC recommends the People's Charter to all trade union branches, and resolves to fully support the Campaign, with a public Launch meeting in Plymouth at the end of March. We further resolve to send this motion, suitable reworded, to the SW TUC.

END

Proposed by TS, who explained the need for a unified response to the recession from the broadest spread of activists within the Labour and TU Movement. He believed this Charter fits the bill, building on the historic experience of the *People's Charter* that mobilised millions during the Chartist Movement of the 1800s. **Seconded** by NY, who explained how needed such an initiative is for the working class. **In discussion**, RR said it could go further but is supportable. DU spoke of the term "greedy banks" where we should highlight "greedy bank executives" – it's not the bank workers, most of whom are on low salaries and face redundancies. DF said we must push the Charter as quickly as possible to offer hope and a mobilising centre to workers facing unemployment, pay cuts and or housing crisis. Following further discussion the motion was **put to the vote** and **Carried Unanimously**.

9. Class Struggle

9.1 Public Sector Workers

9.1.1 Nigel Behan. JG explained that NB is the elected Secretary of Somerset County UNISON, suspended by Somerset County Council and facing a disciplinary Friday 6th March 9:30 Somerset County Hall. JG explained the context of the suspension and disciplinary against NB by Somerset Council, with NB having campaigned against the privatisation of backroom jobs to BM. Further proposed by DT, invite NB to May Day Festival. Following discussion, it was **agreed** to send a message of support for the lobby and invite NB to speak at the May Day Festival.

9.1.2. Yunus Bakhsh: TS circulated cuttings from *Private Eye* and the latest YB Campaign leaflet detailing the involvement of the BNP in the process of the sacking YB from his job as a mental health staff nurse with Newcastle health Trust, and his expulsion from UNISON where he was the long standing Branch Secretary and elected NEC member. New information shows the anonymous witness that was central to both disciplinary procedures was close leading local BNP activists. The issues are now in the public domain, and should be publicised to ensure the return of democratic procedures and vigilance against union infiltration by the Far Right. Following discussion the meeting **agreed** to publicise the issues and send a message of support to Yunus in advance of his employment appeal on 2nd April and UNISON internal appeal against expulsion.

9.1.3. Council Worker's Job Cuts: Report

9.1.3. Land registry PCS: DF spoke of a potential national dispute focussing on a Memorandum of Understanding identifying a crisis at the Land registry, caused by housing downturn. A large voluntary redundancy programme is taking

place for low grade work, with early retirement programme for higher paid and compulsory redundancies on the horizon, and immediate cuts to conditions of service, including the closure of all staff canteens. "Watch this space."

9.1.4. Remploy: BG reported that 54 factories have now been closed whilst managers remain in posts averaging £50kpa, with disabled adults working for £1.70 an hour in supermarkets including *Tesco* stores. The meeting **agreed** to continue to support the campaign.

11. Any Other Business:

11.1. Plymouth Disabilities Action Network (DAN): TJ urged support for the Plymouth campaign to ensure free public transport for the working disabled. Currently there are morning prohibitions to travel passes which cost the disabled dearly. **Agreed** a message of support .

11.2. Apprenticeships: RR raised the issue of below Minimum Wage to Apprentices. **In discussion**, DU advised of the hotline.

12. Date of Next Meeting Wednesday 1st April at the Unite Offices, Sutton Harbour beginning at 7.15pm

END

Minutes taken by TS using word processor during the meeting for contemporary accuracy.

Available on the PTUC Website: www.plymouth-tuc.co.uk