

# Cornwall Trades Union Council

## Minutes of October 28 2024 meeting (online)

**Present:** Brian Blatchford, Susan Fairweather, Rob Hawkins (Unite Retired) Mark Player (UNISON L. G.) Mark Tripcone (CWU), Ross Marshall (NEU), Tony Conway, Geoff Ferguson (PCS ARMS) Mike Butler (Penzance ASLEF), Robbie Woodland (BFAWU), Rob Rooney (Unite Community)

**Apologies:** Richard Westcott (RMT Penzance 1) Reece Weatherburn (UNISON LG), Sandy Easterbrook (NEU, RCN), Jane Creagh (Unite Community)

CTUC president, Rob Rooney, opened the meeting and attendees introduced themselves

**Speaker:** Pete Firmin (Troublemakers at Work)

Pete is a retired postal worker and current vice-chair of a north west London trades council. Troublemakers at Work (TAW) began in 2023 and held its second conference in Manchester on October 5. There were 120 attendees from different unions. TAW's insistence on being a grass-roots organisation is reflected in its insistence that speakers are not full-time trade union officers. Workshops included organising precarious workers, combating racism and sexism in the unions, climate-change, the genocide in Palestinian territories, learning lessons from the 2022/23 strike wave (how much control did members have over their disputes?). A worker from an arms factory also spoke.

Pete spoke about a recent dispute at Cammell Laird shipyard in Birkenhead where unofficial action featured. A live discussion in TAW is who, in the union structure, is able to authorise strike action.

TAW is not affiliated to any political grouping. Its constitution is being drawn up early next year and its AGM is in January.

**Questions:** Mike Butler took up the question of who gets to authorise strike action. In ASLEF it is the executive committee of the union. Was Pete saying that local branches should have more autonomy? Pete replied that in a national dispute it is right that the national EC decides but in the postal industry there are cases when it should be the local branch. Mike replied that that, in his industry, it may be possible for management to undermine disputes called by local branches "and make unions look a little weak."

Tony Conway agreed that decisions on strike action should be taken at the lowest possible level in the union structure but then there is the possibility of senior union officers undermining the action.

Robbie Woodland attended the TAW conference on October 5 and congratulated Pete on helping organise a "fantastic conference." His branch of BFAWU will be affiliating. Robbie said BFAWU branches themselves decide whether to take action or not.

Mark Tripcone said that sometimes, when dealing with big organisations, it is an advantage "to have the solidarity of the whole union"...there needs to be a balance struck between "independence and democracy." Mark agreed there is a big problem around misogyny to be tackled in unions like GMB and TSSA.

Replying to the questions, Pete said he agrees that there is no one answer on the autonomy of strikes for every union in every industry – "it is something for people to look at within their union."

Regarding Amazon and the loss of the recognition ballot at the Coventry factory by the narrowest of margins, Pete said that among the many hurdles, one was the persecution some of the migrant workers there suffered when they joined unions in their home country.

Pete was thanked for his contribution and then left the meeting.

The meeting unanimously agreed to affiliate to Troublemakers at Work (cost £50). Proposed by Susan Fairweather, seconded Mark Tripconey.

**Minutes of September meeting:** Agreed as a true record. Proposed Susan Fairweather, seconded Geoff Ferguson.

**Matters arising:** The meeting agreed to donate £100 to Labour For a New Green Deal – proposed Susan Fairweather, seconded Mark Player.

#### **Branch reports:**

Unite Retired – Brian Blatchford reported that donations have been made to St John Ambulance and Children’s Hospice as well as £200 to CTUC. Brian requested that CTUC provide a receipt.

Penzance ASLEF – Mike Butler recorded his branch’s thanks to Robbie Woodland for consistently attending pickets during the two-year-long strike over pay. There was good public support generally and in ASLEF’s first national dispute since 1982 there was a “victory for trade unions and workers.” Mike welcomed Labour’s general election victory and is hoping the rail minister will visit and reveal the thinking on re-nationalisation of the rail industry.

Ginsters unionisation drive – Robbie Woodland was at the Callington factory on October 26 along with two other CTUC delegates and three from National Shop Stewards Network. It was noticeable how few workers there appear to be at this time and it is unclear what is happening there. The recognition ballot will take place in 2025. It is thought that the cluster of Samworth Brothers (parent company) factories in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire will ensure a vote for recognition.

Tony Conway reported on the Amazon recognition drive in Coventry (he has recently moved to Cornwall from there). Management offered more money to “buy off” workers. There was also a recruitment drive to bring workers in from East Africa. These were employed on short-term contracts and there was a fear they could be sent home if they joined the union.

Tony was at the lobby of Parliament on October 7 over the Labour government’s means-testing of the Winter Fuel Allowance.

**Safe Sick Pay Campaign:** Rob Rooney reported that CTUC is part of this campaign which features support from SW TUC but which is led by a mix of charities and the Diocese of Truro. The new government has committed to Statutory Sick Pay being payable from day one of sickness in its Employment Bill but has, so far, resisted increasing the current paltry amount payable.

Mark Tripconey raised the fact that Cornwall’s two Lib Dem MPs have given their full support to the campaign but the four Labour MPs are silent at present.

Rob Rooney attended a meeting on October 24 in Penryn, organised by the same people running the SSP campaign. This was on “homelessness – prevention to provision.” There were several speakers, followed by questions but in Rob’s opinion what was missing was any political content.

**Secretary position:** Susan Fairweather volunteered to perform this role in the absence of any other volunteers. She is also affiliations officer and pointed out that CTUC will find it difficult to survive if the load is not spread.

**Affiliations:** Nothing further to report. Susan Fairweather said affiliations for 2024 are now all gathered in. Mike Butler said that, due to an oversight, Penzance ASLEF has not yet affiliated for 2024. He will ensure this is rectified.

Tony Conway asked that, prior to January's CTUC AGM, a list is circulated of the organisations CTUC is affiliated to.

**Treasurer's report:** Balance in bank account as at September 30 was £5, 412.70. Richard had supplied a rundown of CTUC spending and revenue.

Mark Player, treasurer of Penzance Palestine Solidarity Campaign, said that although CTUC had resolved to affiliate (£25) nothing had been received so far. Rob Rooney said he would liaise with Richard to ensure payment.

**Any other business:** Mark Tripconey attended a national trade union hazards meeting at Keele University and had supplied reports to the president. It was agreed that Rob Rooney would distribute Mark's reports to the affiliates and that the subject of hazards at work will be discussed in more detail at a future CTUC meeting.

RMT Padstow campaign – Padstow Town Council is seeking to end bus parking at the bottom of the hill, near the town's facilities. Residents and visitors who depend on buses face being discriminated against. RMT has an online petition for people to sign. Hopefully, enough pressure can be applied to persuade the town council to reverse its decision.

Transformation Cornwall: Mark Tripconey said this is a faith-based organisation doing work on mental health, food poverty, homelessness, modern slavery, financial inclusion and the climate emergency. The meeting discussed what modern slavery means in Cornwall and how to combat it. Unions are central to this and awareness needs to be raised. Tony Conway recommended a book, "The truth about modern slavery" by Emily Kennaway, Pluto Press. Tony pointed out the gap in employment law which facilitates exploitation of migrant workers.

South West TUC meetings: SW AGM in Croyde Bay, March 14-15 and SW TUC meeting in Bridgewater on February 22 (in-person only). To be discussed at November CTUC meeting.

**Next CTUC meeting:** Monday November 25, 7pm (by Zoom)

Meeting ended 20:44