

TUC - In ToUCh: the monthly TUC round-up - In ToUCh e-bulletin

In ToUCh

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Welcome

Welcome to *In ToUCh* e-bulletin from the TUC, the bite-size round up of our news and views.

This issue features the TUC's response to the Queen's Speech and the Pre-Budget Report, the latest on the economy, and details of the annual survey of trade union rights violations.

Let us know what you think about the issues reported here by emailing editor@tuc.org.uk.

Copies of *In ToUCh* are archived at www.tuc.org.uk/intouch

TUC News

Right speech for recession

The TUC gave a largely positive response to the Queen's Speech at the opening of the new session of parliament on 3 December.

Arguing that the measures set out will 'help beat the recession' and 'make the country fairer', the TUC particularly welcomed the decision to press ahead with the right to request flexible working, legally binding child poverty targets, and the banking and equality bills.

But the TUC said that welfare reform proposals 'looked like a leftover from pre-recessionary times' and were based on the view that anyone can get a job if they have the right attitudes, training and advice.

Read the full response @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/newsroom/tuc-15704-f0.cfm>

Detailed reaction to Equality Bill @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-15705-f0.cfm>

TUC view of Gregg report on welfare reform @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/welfare/tuc-15701-f0.cfm>

PBR welcomed

November's Pre-Budget Report (PBR), which set out in detail how the Government will respond to the economic downturn, also received a largely positive response from the TUC.

The Chancellor 'was right to inject extra money into the economy,' the TUC said, welcoming 'significant' extra cash for low and medium paid workers and pensioners. The £20bn fiscal stimulus will work alongside the monetary stimulus provided by the Bank of England's decision to cut interest rates by 1.5 points in November and a further point in December.

There was praise for plans in the PBR to increase taxes for the top one per cent, although the TUC suggested that the Government could have gone further and introduced a new minimum tax rate for those earning £100,000 plus.

Full TUC reaction @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-15656-f0.cfm>

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-15655-f0.cfm>

TUC on case for tax reform @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-15667-f0.cfm>

TUC on interest rate cuts @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-15712-f0.cfm>

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-15696-f0.cfm>

Economic lobbying stepped up

In a letter to the Chancellor ahead of the PBR, the TUC set out the case for tax cuts for low and middle income earners, and suggested that the best way to stimulate the economy was to put more money in the pockets of low-paid workers and the unemployed.

The TUC also urged the Government to help the victims of the recession through suspending house repossessions, higher benefits and better redundancy pay, and to be 'as bold in heading off unemployment as it has been in resolving the banking crisis'.

Read more on this @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-15613-f0.cfm>

Jobless need fairness

Prior to the letter to the Chancellor, the TUC set out in detail the case for increasing Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) as a way of boosting demand in the economy.

If JSA had increased in line with earnings, it would now be worth over £100 a week, instead of just £60.50. Citing a study by the US Congressional Budget Office - showing that extending unemployment benefits and food stamps was the most cost-effective way to stimulate the economy - the TUC said a significant increase was affordable by closing the tax loopholes exploited by the super-rich.

Meanwhile, research undertaken by the TUC in November showed that longer term unemployment among young and older workers was growing sharply. Analysis of official figures suggested that it was increasingly difficult for the under 24s and over 50s to find work when they lost their jobs.

More on JSA research @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-15582-f0.cfm>

More on long-term unemployment @

http://www.tuc.org.uk/em_research/tuc-15589-f0.cfm

Time for new economic order

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber joined an international trade union delegation last month to lobby the Washington summit of G20 leaders for a fundamental break with the so-called 'Washington consensus' of deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation.

In the run up to the summit, a statement drawn up by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) put forward a comprehensive blueprint for a new global economic order based on stability and social justice.

Prior to the summit, Brendan used a lecture at Wolverhampton University to urge the UK government to follow Barack Obama's lead and launch a 'green industrial revolution'.

More on G20 summit and ITUC statement @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/newsroom/tuc-15595-f0.cfm>

More on Wolverhampton lecture @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-15580-f0.cfm>

Paying the ultimate price

Nearly 100 trade unionists were murdered in 2007 for daring to campaign for better working rights, according to the International Trade Union Confederation's annual survey of trade union rights violations.

Of the 91 trade unionists who met violent deaths, 39 were in Colombia - once again the most dangerous place in the world to belong to a union - while 30 were victims of President Conte's regime in Guinea.

Other countries where fatal attacks took place on labour movement activists included Argentina, Cambodia, Chile, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Mozambique, Peru, the Philippines and Zimbabwe.

Summary details @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/international/tuc-15646-f0.cfm>

Access full ITUC survey @

<http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article2539>

Raise minimum wage to £6.10

The minimum wage should increase from £5.73 to more than £6.10 an hour from next October, the TUC said as it presented oral evidence to the Low Pay Commission at the beginning of December.

Advising that the adult rate should be payable from 21 and not 22 as at present, and that the number of low-paid jobs in care, cleaning and catering had increased, the TUC argued that the LPC should recommend 'the best minimum wage the economy can afford'.

The TUC added that the minimum wage had 'never had any detrimental effect on the UK economy', and urged the LPC to avoid caution in setting the new rate. As it would apply from 1 October 2009, any increase would come after the worst of the recession, according to Bank of England projections.

Full details @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-15683-f0.cfm>

Activist academy rolled out

The Activist Academy, launched by the TUC and unionlearn to mark the 10th Anniversary of the TUC Organising Academy, is rolling out nationally from January.

The Activist Academy is supporting the increased involvement of union reps in organising campaigns and assisting them in building stronger unions through: recruiting new members; finding new activists; and raising the profile of unions.

Further information @

www.tuc.org.uk/activistacademy

Pay Bargaining 2009

The second joint TUC-Incomes Data Services conference on pay bargaining will be held on 17 February. The conference provides an opportunity for senior union officers, negotiators and researchers to look at the context in which pay bargaining will take place over the next year.

More on this @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/events/detail.cfm?event=3014>

Polish workers network

The TUC is hosting a seminar which will enable union organisers and activists working in the Polish community to share their experiences and look at the possibility of establishing a Polish workers network. The conference takes place at Congress House on 26 January.

More information @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/events/detail.cfm?event=3032>

Working time focus

A UK delegation will be taking part in an international demonstration in Strasbourg on 16 December, on the eve of the European Parliament vote on the revised Working Time Directive.

Union delegates will join colleagues from across Europe in a march under the slogan 'Priority to Workers Rights, Not Longer Working Hours' before lobbying MEPs to back a stronger directive.

The TUC has announced that next year's 'Work Your Proper Hours Day' will be held on Friday 27 February, the date when official statistics suggest that workers who do unpaid overtime in effect stop working for free.

More on Work Your Proper Hours Day @

<http://www.worksmart.org.uk/workyourproperhoursday/>

Equality reps conference

A conference to showcase the work of equality reps is to be held at Congress House on 9 February. It has been organised by the Equality Reps Project, which is based in the Equalities and Employment Rights Department.

More on Equality Reps Project @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-15129-f0.cfm>

Social justice - the progressive way

The TUC used a prominent event in the political calendar to urge ministers to put more emphasis on social justice, fairness and equality.

Speaking at the annual conference of the Labour fringe group Progress, Brendan Barber argued that the global financial crisis had put the right on the 'intellectual back foot' and said that it was up to the progressive centre left to articulate an alternative vision of globalisation that delivered for the many not the few.

Details @

<http://www.progressonline.org.uk/Magazine/article.asp?a=3611>

A place to live

New guidance to help young people find decent housing during the downturn has been published by the TUC.

As well as steering young people through the options open to them, the guide includes advice from the National Union of Students on how to inspect a property.

Summary details @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/newsroom/tuc-15714-f0.cfm>

Download guidance in full @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/housingleaflet.pdf>

Zimbabwe call

The TUC has asked British workers to flood the email account of Gideon Gono, Governor of Zimbabwe's central bank, urging him to allow ordinary workers in Zimbabwe to be able to withdraw enough money to pay their daily living costs.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has called for an end to the limit on the amount of money ordinary Zimbabweans can withdraw each day and asked workers in the country to march on the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) on 3 December to demand their cash.

Find out more @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/international/tuc-15689-f0.cfm>

Regional links strengthened

The TUC has joined forces with England's Regional Development Agencies in signing an official Memorandum of Understanding at a ceremony attended by all TUC regional secretaries and RDA union board members.

The document formalises the relationship between the two bodies, and provides a clear framework for how the organisations can best work together to improve regional economic performance.

More on this @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/newsroom/tuc-15650-f0.cfm>

Gender pay gap widens

The increase in the full-time gender pay gap to 17.1 per cent and its part-time equivalent to 36.6 per cent 'makes the case for decisive action more pressing than ever', the TUC said last month.

The figures were published on 15 November in the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), and showed that the pay gap was even wider in the private sector.

Reiterating its call for mandatory pay audits, the TUC said the findings were 'an injustice for both men and women'. As economic pressures increased, it was 'more important than ever that women are not underpaid for what they do'.

More on the survey @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-15601-f0.cfm>

Business benefits of better maternity pay @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-15579-f0.cfm>

Safety strategy welcomed . . .

The Health & Safety Executive's draft strategy received a positive response from the TUC when it was published earlier in December.

Described as a 'welcome clarification' of the HSE's future direction, the TUC added that unions would 'particularly like the commitment to safety regulation and enforcement' as well as recognition of the role of safety reps.

Details @

http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-15707-f0.cfm

. . . but health plans insufficient

Meanwhile, the Government's response to Dame Carol Black's review of the health of Britain's working age population attracted criticism from the TUC last month.

Although the response went 'some way' to addressing the health problems faced by workers, and those unable to work because of ill-health, the TUC argued 'it could have gone much further.'

In another development on the health and safety front during November, the TUC said that employers who risk the health of their employees by exposing them to cancer-causing chemicals at work should be prosecuted under UK safety laws, as a new guide on the subject was published.

Reaction to Dame Carol Black review @

http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-15659-f0.cfm

TUC on dangerous chemicals @

http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-15641-f0.cfm

Read new chemicals guide @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/occupationalcancer.pdf>

Tackling violence against women

International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women on 25 November saw the TUC supporting the 'white ribbon' campaign which tackles violence against women.

The TUC is working alongside a number of unions, including the Professional Footballers Association (PFA), to commit the labour movement to ending violence against women.

More on this @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-15661-f0.cfm>

Pensions update

The TUC reacted cautiously last month to the review of Section 75 of the Pensions Act announced by pensions minister Rosie Winterton.

Section 75 provides an important protection for pension scheme members and unions 'will be extremely concerned at any suggestion that it is weakened', the TUC said.

Meanwhile, the TUC said the FairPensions report published in November underlined 'the importance of taking a long-term responsible approach to investment and ownership'.

More on Section 75 @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/pensions/tuc-15586-f0.cfm>

More on FairPensions report @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/pensions/tuc-15574-f0.cfm>

Personal accounts: no alternative

A speech by shadow Work and Pensions Secretary Chris Grayling on the future of personal accounts came in for short shrift from the TUC last month.

The TUC said personal accounts 'are an essential part of the new pensions settlement' and that the auto-enrolment system could not work without them. Abandoning personal accounts would at best 'be a wholesale capitulation to pensions industry vested interests,' and at worst 'could destabilise' the UK pensions system.

Further details @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/pensions/tuc-15677-f0.cfm>

Internet weak link?

As Get Safe Online week drew to a close during November, the TUC launched a new toolkit to improve workers' internet security awareness and skills.

Although many employers are improving internet security systems, the TUC said that their good work could be undermined if they fail to ensure their staff's skills are up to date.

Access the new toolkit @

www.worksmart.org.uk/fun/nsfw

End transgender prejudice

Employers should stop discriminating against transgender people in the workplace, the TUC said as it marked International Trans Memorial Day on 20 November.

The TUC is working with transgender union members and representatives of the trans community to campaign for Britain's equality laws to provide comprehensive protection from discrimination for trans people.

More on this @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/newsroom/tuc-15615-f0.cfm>

Events

11 Dec UK social investment seminar

16 Dec ETUC working time demonstration

17 Dec Patients rights seminar

23 Jan Discrimination law conference

26 Jan Polish workers network seminar

9 Feb Equality reps conference

17 Feb Pay bargaining in 2009 conference

27 Feb Work Your Proper Hours Day

More info on TUC events @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/events/index.cfm>

New this month

Opposing workfare and privatisation - TUC response to Green Paper on welfare reform - available from Economic & Social Affairs Department.

Response to the national debate on care and support - TUC response to the government initiated debate - from Economic & Social Affairs Department.

Congress Report 2008 - verbatim report of the 2008 Congress - available later this month from Publications, price £24 (£10 for unions).

Details of TUC publications @

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/publications/index.cfm>

Links

Visit the website of the Working Class Movement Library @ www.wcml.org.uk

Please email editor@tuc.org.uk if you wish to suggest a new link for the TUC website.