

TUDA News SEPTEMBER 2010

TUDA Training

First 3-day TUDA "Removing Barriers" Training is set to begin on 22 October 2010. Read more at pages 11 - 12.

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NEWS in Brief

Disability Benefits Coalition – Survey

The Coalition is doing a survey to find out more about disabled people's experiences of the benefits system. They say:

"We are going to use the information we get from the survey to help the Government better understand the impact changes to benefits like Incapacity Benefit, Disability Living Allowance and Local Housing Allowance will have on disabled people. We will also use the information to make people more aware of how important benefits are. You can take the survey here. The survey is open to all disabled people."

The survey will run until **20th October 2010**.

Please reply quickly. Reply today. If we get a lot of responses already we can pass early information onto Government and hopefully safeguard key disability benefits.

Disability Benefits Coalition, to lobby government and parliamentarians, see <http://www.disabilityalliance.org/dbc.htm>.

Rally and Protest Marches

On **1 September** in Bolton there was a huge protest against Bolton council's plans to savagely cut 40% off its budget. It is expected these cuts will cost 1,400 jobs, not to mention the effects on services. Organised by Kieran Grogan, Bolton Metro Unison young member officer (personal capacity) and South Lancashire Socialist Party

CWU activists joined hundreds of trade unionists from across the UK on **Sunday 13 September** in a protest march and rally in central Manchester against government cuts.

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) organised the event ahead of this year's TUC Congress to send a strong message to union leaders that the cuts must not go unchallenged.



Cries of "save our jobs", "no to cuts" and "national demo now" rang out through the streets of Manchester, bringing traffic to a halt as the colourful banners and bands passed the conference centre up to the birthplace of the TUC, the Mechanics Institute.

Join us!

Coinciding with the Conservative Party Conference, a rally and march, organised by disabled activists and The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) is set to take place in Birmingham on 3 October, as part of a larger march protesting against coalition spending cuts.

When - **Sunday, October 3rd, 2010.**

Where - International Convention Centre, Birmingham

Rally – noon and March - 1 p.m.

If the weather is good we will meet at the fountain in Chamberlain Square at 11.30 am and walk to the ICC together otherwise, or for anyone who finds it easier, we will meet inside the ICC in the room where the rally will take place.

To support, volunteer or for information, contact Tina Hogg on tel.: 01989 768 195 email tina_hogg@yahoo.co.uk

A second protest – organised by the campaigning network Mad Pride – has been planned for London on Tuesday 26 October, days after the government announces the results of its spending review.

When – **26 October, 2010**

Where - near the café at Speaker's Corner, Hyde Park, London

Rally at 1pm

Personal and social care needs

Local authorities are changing eligibility criteria in order to meet demands of spending cuts. Eight in 10 councils in England will not meet adult service users' moderate care needs by next year on current trends, exclusive Community Care research reveals. The answer? Change the criteria.



Five councils with a moderate threshold - Bolton, Derbyshire, Lancashire, Poole and Westminster - are proposing to tighten criteria to substantial this year. The Isle of Wight is proposing to raise its threshold from substantial to critical A survey, based on Freedom of Information requests, found three-quarters of councils now meet critical or substantial care needs only.

Disabled people pushed to the brink of poverty

Facts

Data from Family Resources Survey and the National Equalities Panel found that:

- 75% of disabled women and 70% of disabled men are already at the bottom end of Britain's income distribution scale living in poverty.
- A tenth of disabled woman have incomes below £31 per week and a tenth of disabled men have incomes below £59 per week including earned income and benefits.
- Already 30% of disabled people live below the poverty line and 1 in 4 families with disabled children cannot afford heating
- Under the coalition government's economy drive disabled people are set to lose at least £140 per month through direct cuts to disability benefits (initially devised to pay the extra costs of being disabled) alone.

Disability Living Allowance and other Benefits

- The Tories have threatened to remove our DLA saying that the number of claimants must be reduced by one-fifth.
- Employment Support Allowance and work capability assessments have been criticised by CAB, disability charities and Disabled People's Organisations. The government have now said that from October 2010 they will speed up the re-assessment of everyone currently claiming Incapacity Benefit so that 10,000 claimants a week are 'processed'
- Housing Benefits for all tenants will be reduced.



- From October 2011 for those 2 million disabled people living in private rented accommodation and from 2013 for anyone living in social housing which is deemed too large for their needs
- Added to that funding from the Independent Living Fund for care and support has now ceased to all new claimants and any additional needs cannot be met by them
- Social Services budgets are under extreme pressure and nearly all Social Services departments have been told to reduce their budgets by 25% which has an obvious knock-on effect to their provision of care and the amount people need to pay towards this.

Who said this? - Quotes:

(1) "We are concerned that the Government has not adequately assessed the impact that spending cuts will have on disabled people and their families. The Government should take steps to ensure that spending cuts will not further compound poverty and social exclusion experienced by disabled people."

(2) Plans to reassess all incapacity benefit claimants on their fitness to work and introduce medical assessments for disability living allowance could reverse "a decade of relative progress" in opportunities for disabled people.

(3) "...the Atos medical is to judge someone's capability of taking up employment. I'm a bit like yourself in that I'm nervous, very nervous of the Atos medical re-assessments as I doubt seriously their purpose, to me they are simply being used as a tool to lower the Welfare budget."

(4) "We are fed up with being vilified as scroungers by successive governments; we are sick of hearing about disabled people who have died from neglect and lack of services or who have committed suicide because services and benefits were withdrawn from them. We are fed up with being unfairly picked on because we are seen as vulnerable and we want to make sure politicians know we will not accept these attacks on our lives any longer. As disabled people we can and will fight back..."

(5) "We will move to coordinate industrial action to defend all we hold dear, all the past generations have fought for."



See below for answers.

Who said this? - Answers

- (1)** Lib-Dems Andrew George and Bob Russell teamed up with Conservative Peter Bottomley on 13 September to speak up against savage cuts
- (2)** John Knight, director of policy and campaigns at Leonard Cheshire Disability, 28 July
- (3)** Message posted on Outch! Friday 17 September
- (4)** Linda Burnip, a trustee of Coventry and Warwickshire Council of Disabled People, and one of the organisers of the Birmingham protest
- (5)** Dave Prentis, general secretary of Unison

TUC CONFERENCE 2010

By Richard Cooke

President, Congress

Richard Cook pleased to represent the TUC Disability Committee
For Unite the Union

With a speech impairment

I use this poem

As its rhythm help me

So you will not then moan

The Disability Conference chose to send

The Unite motion to Congress this year

No wonder as this motion is absolutely great

It says so much about our fears

Now this Unite motion becomes the TUC disability motion called

A workplace agenda for disabled workers

With a new government: We also have a new fight

Our fight is: We need a new set of rights for disabled workers

Disabled workers are the first people to be made redundant



Discrimination stops us from: Applying for jobs and getting work
1 in 7 disabled people have lost their job in the past year
It is for the public sector: We are more likely to work
So it will get worse if public services are cut
Also we should celebrate the fights we have won

Only half of disabled people are employed
Compared to two thirds for the rest of the population
Driving accidents at work are classed as road traffic accidents
This should be changed so they can also be compensated

Agency workers are not aware of their rights
We must make them aware of this
We know our campaigning role: Is still rather vital
Achieving disability rights: Or sadly we just miss
We must ensure: Unions put monitoring in place
However the TUC must always be our lead
By campaigning for equality reps and disability champions
Or disabled people often feel: They just merely bleed

Belfast recently made a major move
Northern Ireland's brilliant Equality Commission
Launched a forum for disability champions
Meeting four times a year: Looking at all successful cases

We must continue our campaign
In the whole of the UK
For statutory disabled union reps
Or we are merely blown away

Equality is not just for the good times
As we said at the disability conference:
'Nothing about us without us'
And it might be world peace next!

Not really the subject: But I agree: So this is also now sussed
I move this very important motion thank you.



TUDA Article:

“Who is cheating who?”

One Million people off Disability Benefits

By a CWC TUDA member

The new coalition government has stated their intention to remove one million people from sickness and disability benefits. Is this being done by using a flawed medical assessment system? The assessment process is administered by a "For Profit" company called Atos Healthcare. A recent documentary on BBC 1 Scotland seems to support this fear as the BBC research team uncovered quite shocking information regarding the Employment and Support Allowance medical assessments carried out by doctors working for Atos Healthcare.

Assessment interview – biased?

One G. P. who was interviewed had serious concerns and thought there was clear evidence that the medical assessment used by Atos healthcare was biased. Was it an open interview, or was it quite defined and limited, and not exploring all areas? Whose evidence counts? The medical assessors used by Atos healthcare are apparently refusing to consider, or choosing to ignore medical evidence provided by the claimant's G.P. or hospital consultants and therefore coming to a very different conclusion in the medical assessment of claimants.

Rising number of appeals

Through "Freedom of Information", the BBC found that up to a staggering 8,000 appeals are being heard every month. The Tribunals who hear these appeals are more thorough it seems. They inquire broadly in an open interview where all the evidence is considered, including written medical evidence from the claimant's own G.P. and hospital consultants. The result is that 40% of appellants are successful in overturning the decision to refuse or stop their benefit. This still leaves over half who fail.



However, out of the 8,000 people who appeal these decisions every month, 3,200 of them are found to have been wrongly assessed by Atos healthcare.

The current Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who was on the Parliamentary Committee that scrutinized the welfare reform bill in 2007 was interviewed and he believes that the very high number of successful appeals demonstrates a serious failing in the way the system is being implemented by Atos. He also wanted to see if Atos was being incentivised by Government Ministers to give results that take people off benefit, but he was not given access to parts of the contract relating to how Atos was paid.

Disabled people speak out

“This is totally unacceptable in anyone's opinion and Atos healthcare and its medical assessors have to be thoroughly investigated by this government to establish where the system has gone so drastically wrong and put it right once and for all.”

Disability campaigners agree. The Alliance for Inclusive Education points out that benefits designed to pay the extra costs of disability and originally awarded for a lifetime term are being reassessed. Many who were certified by medically qualified and independent doctors are losing their meagre incomes to politically appointed and performance incentivised ATOS assessors. The Alliance informs further that data from the National Equalities Panel shows that over three quarters of all disabled people live in poverty with a tenth of disabled women attempting to live on less than 31 pounds a week. Yet ATOS makes millions in profits.

Despite these voices of discontent, the government has signalled their intention to press ahead with a planned roll out of the Employment and Support Allowance and comprehensive spending review measures. We must protest!



TUDA member's comment

A TUDA member, who watched the BBC programme reports that the BBC however, were able to interview a doctor who had carried out incapacity assessments for Atos. This doctor was taken aside and told by Atos that her assessments were too soft and that she was assessing too many people as unfit for work. The doctor was told that her figures were higher than the national average. This is proof that the whole system is target driven and there is an incentive for doctors working for Atos to assess a lower number of people as unfit for work. The BBC also interviewed the person who was commissioned by the government to design the key elements of the Employment and Support Allowance and even he expressed serious concerns that too many people were not entering the system that he had been asked to design to help them.

DISCLAIMER: Views expressed are those of individuals, not their UNIONS and not TUDA. We have taken every care to present correct and up-to-date information. If you see any mistakes, please do let us know.



A TUDA Discussion Point: Unemployed yet activist?

As more and more disabled people face unemployment or even greater difficulties finding paid work, why are some Unions not offering membership to unemployed disabled trade unionists? We, too, want to get involved in organised solidarity and campaigns. We, too, have an interest in work, employment and fairness. Anyone 'currently without Union' can join TUDA as a supporting subscriber for £10 per year or an as unwaged supporter for £2.

Our TUDA membership is drawn from very diverse backgrounds. TUDA strength is that it connects trade union activism with different aspects of disability politics. We invite TUDA members to introduce themselves and tell us some of the campaigns and actions they and their Unions are involved in.

TUDA Training

Removing Barriers - Disability Champion and Campaigning

A new 3-day course has been developed and is offered by TUDA Training. Open to any trade union member who is disabled. No prior knowledge needed, open to new or experienced trade unionists, disabled people or Disability Champions who are interested in championing disability equality issues. TUDA Supporting subscribers are welcome.

AIM: To strengthen trade unionists to identify, organise and campaign on disability equality issues.

The first meeting is held on 22 October, in London. The second meeting in February focuses on campaigning issues. The final meeting in April concludes with legal up-dates and final action.

The course will be facilitated by Dave Smith, an experienced TUC Trade Union trainer.

- explore why discrimination occurs
- build trade union counter argument
- consider barriers to progress



- clarify our understanding of the "Social Model"
- concepts of trade union organising
- explore campaigning strategies
- note key points of the legislation
- understand when the DDA /Equality Act can be used

Due to very popular demand, not everyone was successful. I am sorry we had to turn interested people away on this occasion. TUDA Training is therefore looking to re-run this course for new applicants in the Spring, 2011. Watch this space!

About TUDA News:

Thank you again to all TUDA members who have contributed to this September issue,
Keep sending us your stuff!

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Email Richard (TUDA editor, UNITE) at findcook@hotmail.com

A request from the TUDA News team:

Can you switch to **electronic TUDA News**? We need to save TUDA money and can speed up the provision of information. If you have email (and we understand not everyone does) please switch to email (let us know your preferred format: by attachment, large font or in the email text). Thanks to everyone who signed up already to e-TUDA News.

TUDA Contacts: TUDA Secretary Sheila Blare, Membership Secretary Sherrell Martin can be contacted via our box number, BM TUDA, London WC1N 3XX. Email: mail@tuda.org.uk



How to join TUDA

I wish to receive more Information about TUDA:

Email: mail@tuda.org.uk or send this form and
Write to: Membership, **BM TUDA, London WC1N 3XX**

Name _____

Trade Union _____ **Position (if applicable)** _____

E mail: _____

Post Address (if applicable) _____

_____ **Post Code** _____

Preferred format

By Email **By post** **Audio**

Text Print 14 point (standard)

Large Print, please give size

BSL / Video **Braille**

Membership Fees:

1. Individual Disabled Person £7.00 unwaged £2.00
2. Supporting Subscriber £10.00
3. Union Branch £25.00
4. Union Region £50.00
5. National Unions with 100,000 members or less £100.00
6. Unions with 100,001 to 500,000 members £150.00
7. Unions with over 500,000 members £200.00

Please make **cheques** payable to Trade Union Disability Alliance.