

champions
challenge
change
strategy
independent
modern
growing
recruiting
proactive
dynamic
organising
campaigning
solidarity
internationalism
global
unity

tssa
e.SPECIAL

June 2009



The timing of TSSA annual conference 2009 and the annual national reps seminar made it impossible to produce TSSA e-journal. This e-special covers the highlights of conference and the reps seminar. The July TSSA Journal will be 24 pages as usual (mailed/mailed on 1 July) and this e-special will be a pull-out in that journal.

You may have noticed there was no TSSA Conference News posted on the website and I intended to report on annual conference business here, but events took over.

As in any democratic organisation, TSSA, particularly at conference, can face conflict between the different strands of the union. Sometimes this can be difficult to resolve.

This year, there was disagreement over general secretary Gerry Doherty's application of Rule 42d of the Association, which had resulted in a number of TSSA branches not being issued with valid conference delegate credentials. Legal advice on the interpretation and application of the Rules was sought.

The general secretary, acting on that legal advice, upheld his decision. TSSA's executive committee voted against. After prolonged discussion, the president, Andy Bain, decided to cancel conference as entitled to do under the Rules.

The president said a special delegate conference, properly constituted and represented by all TSSA branches entitled to send delegates, will be held later during 2009.

As Frances O'Grady, TUC deputy general secretary, stated time and again in her speech, TSSA should be proud to be 'living proof of what a dynamic, organising, specialist trade union can do [...] you set the pace on defending pay, pensions and workplace learning'. TSSA, strong in its traditions and in its future, will move forward, united in our efforts to continue growing and developing as a modern, independent trade union.

Pauline Sturges, TSSA Journal editor



Down to Walkden House with blue-sky thinking

AN IMAGINATIVE AND challenging strategic plan for TSSA was outlined to conference by TSSA's assistant general secretary, Manuel Cortés. With the key aim of continued independence, TSSA must be independent financially and in terms of membership. Only in this way can the union advance the interests of members. The message was stark: if TSSA continues on its present course, it will be unable to function financially and lose its independence.

'Reducing costs is one avenue but one which would ultimately lead to the cul de sac of being submerged into another larger union,' stated Manuel. 'Membership has to increase by one third and expenditure increases kept to under 10 per cent while significant investment needs to be made in TSSA's IT infrastructure and electronic communications.'

'The way forward,' Manuel continued,

'is not to keep our heads in the clouds and hope for blue sky but to think outside the box, to innovate, to lead and, crucially, to utilise TSSA's greatest asset, Walkden House.'

If TSSA is to stay an independent, specialist and modern trade union, it needs to:

- make strategic alliances with similar size trade unions (those of under 100,000 members) who organise in the transport and travel industries
- invest in technological and electronic communications infrastructure putting aside £275,000 per annum into a ring-fenced fund to address the backlog of investment without impinging on day-to-day activities.

TSSA has the asset needed to achieve this – Walkden House. However, it is no longer fit for purpose, and is expensive to maintain. Recent essential maintenance will prolong its life span by five years.

TSSA must be bold and leap from blue-sky thinking down to earth with major investment in a new, state-of-the-art multi-resource green building befitting the 21st century. Rebuild Walkden House – bigger, environmentally friendly (recycling rain/waste water, motion sensitive lighting, computer controlled heating) with a multi-resource centre (reference library, studio facilities, meeting rooms) – and create the first purpose-built, multi-union HQ.

To achieve this by 2015, TSSA must start talking to potential alliance partners now, it must produce a five-year investment strategy, and develop the practical project plan for Walkden House. 'This is the plan and, in my view the only one that can take TSSA forward and survive,' said Manuel. 'We have a few more months of discussion before the executive committee makes a final decision before the end of 2009.' ◀◀

Transport Salaried Staffs' Association

General secretary: **Gerry Doherty**

Helpdesk (workplace rights advice for members)
0800 3282673 (UK) 1800 805 272 (Rep of Ireland)

Website www.tssa.org.uk (UK) www.tssa.ie (Ireland)

TSSA e-special is published by TSSA, Walkden House, 10 Melton Street, London NW1 2EJ

Editor: Pauline Sturges 07809 583020 ● sturgesp@tssa.org.uk

Design and production: Wild Strawberry Communications www.wildstrawberry.uk.com

Views published are not necessarily those of TSSA.



The best night of the week, see page 4

TSSA are the champions, says TUC

'A FORMIDABLE CHAMPION of working people' praised Frances O'Grady, TUC deputy general secretary, speaking in an open session to conference. 'You've ensured that TSSA is the living proof of what a dynamic, organising, specialist trade union can do.' She was to praise TSSA for its rising membership – increasing for the sixth month in a row, saying other unions could learn a thing or two from TSSA.

Frances was clear what TSSA had achieved under the leadership of its general

secretary with the support of the whole union: 'You've set the pace on defending pay, pensions and workplace learning, and done all of this in an industry that's characterised by fragmentation, by shift working and non-standard conditions.

'You've shown the practical value of international solidarity, standing shoulder to shoulder with transport workers in Zimbabwe and speaking out against the injustices suffered by our sisters and brothers in Colombia.'

Frances congratulated

'whoever in the TSSA named the 12-hour Penzance to Edinburgh train, now minus any catering services, the Weight-Watchers Express,' and paid tribute to TSSA's 'bold, imaginative campaign to stop these great losses and to protect the quality of services to the travelling public' as well as 'the joint work with sister unions proving the value of rail unions speaking with one voice.'

The praise kept coming and TSSA members in danger of swollen heads were brought down to earth by the task ahead. TSSA had shown the way forward on defence of its workforce, training, structure, investment in transport, recruitment. But 'we are never going to win any political arguments if industrially we are weak. We must have the determination to reach a new generation of workers who so



'TSSA punches well above its weight within the TUC and wider movement, and it is the living proof of what a dynamic, organising, specialist trade union can do.'

badly and desperately need trades unionism now.

'Together I believe that we can make a difference and we can give working people a strong voice at work fighting back for them against job cuts and pay freezes, as well as a source of solidarity in the community speaking up for all races, all nationalities, all colours, all creeds.' ◀◀



Women in Focus (WiF) celebrates its tenth anniversary

Holding the front line

ANDY BAIN, TSSA president, in his keynote address to conference, spoke of the 'disconnect between the twin structures of the democratic and policy forming branches, divisional councils and conference which hold our leadership to account and the company based representatives at local and national level.'

Andy said the organising model maximises the 'roles, responsibilities and the skills of our reps while providing professional backup where it's required. The reps, our front line, are our future, and without them we have very little.'

170 reps were coming to the two-day seminar while 80 delegates representing 58 branches and SOGs out of 156 branches were at conference. Andy said the branch organisation was 'struggling to function adequately' with some meeting rarely with only two or three attending.

'We need to get in touch with reps, have an open meeting on the key issues in the workplace that they can tell you about.' He said branches should experiment with different approaches. The aim was to make use of hard fought for democratic structures so that TSSA was inclusive, and truly representative.

Andy spoke of the challenges from employers facing

'The reps, our front line, are our future, and without them we have very little.'



members now and the fightback with pickets, publicity and strikes, with the support and back-up of TSSA reps and staff. He mentioned how the railway clerks back in 1856 began to organise, how TSSA emerged and its structures grew to support the reps work against employers and government. He made the point that if branches and conference were to die, 'reps would demand that in order to best represent their members, we need to build a structure to develop national policies, to tackle rail industry ownership, trade union laws, a detailed strategy to challenge the big employers and make an impact on pension law'. His call to both conference and the reps seminar was 'to promote and develop both structures' so that they were united in the 'progress for an independent and growing trade union'. ◀◀

'Can any trade unionist turn their back when they hear of



such atrocities?' declared TSSA general secretary, Gerry Doherty, after hearing Carmen Mayusa speak.

'During my visit to Colombia in 2007,' Gerry explained, 'I went to a women's prison in Bogota where a number of women were held in Patio Six, the political wing. Carmen Mayusa's story really affected me. I resolved that I would do whatever I could to help her. The last thing she said to me was: 'I've been eighteen months in here on a fake charge, incarcerated, for organising workers.'

Gerry told of the efforts by TSSA to get Carmen permission to leave Colombia and speak to, not only TSSA conference, but also to other meetings during her two week stay in the UK. 'I wanted her to come here, to tell you first hand of her experience,' said Gerry. Carmen's entire visit was funded by TSSA's solicitors Morrish and Gerry applauded their solidarity.

Gerry pledged TSSA support to Carmen and her comrades. He said TSSA executive committee had opposed ongoing military aid to the Uribe regime, calling for it to be switched to social development and for human rights. He called for continued support and funding for Justice for Colombia, praising their often dangerous work.

Incarcerated – for organising workers

CARMEN MAYUSA thanked everyone who had given support and solidarity to her and her fellow activists as well as help getting her visa so 'I could share with you and others the painful experiences that we, as trades unionists, have to go through.'

'The Colombian government is backed by the United States and they use terror tactics,' Carmen told conference, 'I'm talking about the government of President Alvara Uribe Velez. They assassinate us, they forcibly disappear us, they displace us, force us to flee our homes and jobs and they jail us. And the people they're targeting are social activists, union activists, political activists who oppose the regime in Colombia.

'They criminalise us, they throw us in jail. Hundreds of mainly union activists have been put in prison, because we oppose the globalisation of these neo-liberal policies which have caused so much tragedy in Latin America in particular.

'I spent 25 months locked



up in jail without being on trial. My sister, another union activist, was locked up as well. Three of my brothers were trade unionists, all three of them have been assassinated – killed because they opposed the government.

'These attacks haven't actually meant that we are shying away from our struggle, they've strengthened us. And one thing that really helped strengthen us has been the international solidarity.

'It doesn't stop when they let us out of prison. They appealed against my release and they ordered that I couldn't work. So what they're trying to do is, because I can't earn an income now, is kill me slowly by strangling my family.

'Over the last 23 years they

[Colombia's governments] have allowed over ten thousand trades unionists to be assassinated, over five thousand political oppositionists to be murdered. Four million people have been forced to leave their homes and their land in Colombia, and many hundreds of my colleagues have had to leave the country, forced to live in exile abroad. It was the only way to save their lives.

'The government of President Uribe Velez, who came to power in 2002, has assassinated over 550 union members. Since January, I know of 17 union colleagues who've been assassinated. But the President has no shame, he goes around the world telling the world that they don't kill trades unionists in his country and that they do respect human rights. That is not true.

'Our call from Colombia then is for unity and solidarity in the face of suffering. We need to support those colleagues who are still in jail, and I ask you to look at what you can do to help.' ◀◀



'The best event of the whole week', 'great music and dancing', 'do it again next year', 'what a night'. Just a few of the comments from the E-MIX multi-cultural social organised by Manjit and Asif of TSSA's E-MIX self-organising group for black and ethnic minorities.

Gerry Doherty, in welcoming Esther and Gideon from ZARWU (Zimbabwe Amalgamated Railway Workers Union) said: 'Can anyone in the world be anything but moved at the plight of ordinary Zimbabweans, so badly let down by a government led by one previously hailed as a freedom fighter but who now appears to have so little regard for democracy?' This twinning project with TSSA's sister trade union is what internationalism is about.



Esther, Gideon and Carmen pictured together in Torquay

Testaments for change in Zimbabwe



Esther Munyamana, chair of ZARWU's national women's committee and a member of Zimbabwe congress of trade unions' women's advisory committee

ESTHER'S SPEECH TO

conference was subdued following Carmen's moving account of life as a trade unionist in Colombia. The

following day, in her speech to E-MIX's fringe meeting, Esther's humour endeared her to the packed audience as she repeatedly and pointedly looked at Gideon as she lambasted the failings of the Zimbabwe male in the home.

The challenges facing women in Zimbabwe are great, she said. But 'this is not only peculiar to Zimbabwe, but is a trait the world over. In the workplace., maternity protection remains inadequate in Zimbabwe, great strides were made – the major achievement was the increasing of maternity pay from 90 to 98 days.

'But when this positive change was made in the Labour Act, something else was taken away from women. The Labour Act cuts back on maternity leave for women who have worked for less than a year for an employer. The remuneration for women who fall pregnant after serving for less than one year at a workplace is at the discretion of the employer. What this means is that a woman can actually be fired for falling pregnant or alternatively go on unpaid leave or return to work just days after giving birth.

'Employers also weigh the options of employing women versus men and quite a considerable number of employers prefer men, as women are considered a cost to the company. This poses serious challenges for women as their reproductive rights are infringed upon and they are discriminated against on the grounds of gender.

'HIV and Aids have also presented a big challenge for working women in Zimbabwe. Women have to manage dual roles: as a worker, as a mother and also as a caretaker for sick family members. This and any of our roles of multi-tasking is draining for women both spiritually and mentally. They are still expected to perform at a par with their male counterparts, even in such difficult conditions. It is a fact, though, that the women rarely grumble.

'HIV and Aids, even in cases where they are also infected, they are still expected to act as caretakers to their partners. Some of the challenges are harassment, victimisation, lack of equal opportunities in the workplace. The challenges that women are facing can be alleviated if the authorities take time to understand the immense contribution that women can make to the growth of the nation if they're allowed to realise their full potential.

'Zimbabwe is slowly making progress on these issues, but our wish is for replacement of the Act so that women do not continue to be disadvantaged.' ◀◀

Gideon Shoko, general secretary of ZARWU 'Zimbabwe's present day problems are very simple. The problem is Robert Mugabe, and nobody else. You take Robert Mugabe from the equation, and Zimbabwe will go back to where it was.

'When he took the land from those who were there at independence, there were about 6,400 farmers. Mugabe grabbed the land from them. He gave it to his friends. They started photocopying money. It turned out that his friends did not till the land, what they simply did was use the money he gave them. They sold the implements, the fertilizer, the diesel, and the petrol. Instead, they grew something we call soya grass. You don't need any money to grow grass, because grass is something that comes naturally. So Zimbabwe has become a basket case instead of becoming the bread basket of Africa.'

Gideon thanked TSSA for its solidarity and said Zimbabwe, with international support, would one day return to being the bread basket of Africa. ◀◀



You are the future

A theme of both TSSA annual conference and the reps seminar was globalisation and internationalism. Speeches from Gideon Shoko from ZARWU and Mac Urata of the ITF stressed the links. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the Irish public sector group (see page 8). But all 170 reps at the seminar spent two days researching, thinking, discussing and coming up with solutions to their issues and problems. These leaders in their workplaces worked hard during the day and partied into the night.

MANUEL CORTES, TSSA assistant general secretary, opened the seminar with stirring words of what it means to be in a union and that this seminar was to give TSSA reps the tools they need in the workplace to fight redundancy, to win better pay and conditions, to get union recognition, to achieve vibrant branches and to continue to make TSSA into a growing modern trade union.



MAC URATA is the secretary of the rail division of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and he recounted the history of the ITF, formed in 1896. All the ITF's experience in its existence taught them that 'organising international solidarity does not have to be on a defensive basis.



'If some union is attacked from an employer, of course we can gather our efforts together to make sure that we can push them back,' said Mac. 'But if coordination for an international organisation can be this effective, what about setting up some offensive tactics so that we can deliver more outcomes to a larger network of affiliates? That is why we have been campaigning over the last ten years.'

Mac mentioned the Safety First Action Day and No to the Violence action day, which was on Workers' Memorial Day in April this year. He also said ITF raised awareness of 'our affiliates

and their members that issues you face, like the consequences of deregulation on the working conditions, longer working hours, lesser pay, is not just confined to your country or to your members, but also a problem in Romania and Canada and Japan. They realise that globalisation has a major impact for working people all over the world.'

Mac urged support for an ITF and TUC day of action on 26 June calling for the release of Mansour Osanloo and other Iranian trade unionists. Action was not confined to protests and trade union solidarity but included meetings with the World Bank, EU and multinational companies.

GIDEON SHOKO is the general secretary of ZARWU, the main railway trade union in Zimbabwe with which TSSA is twinned and also deputy secretary general of the ZCTU's congress of trade unions.



Gideon described his union, ZARWU, formed in 1916, a small union of 7,800 members and the issues it faced in Zimbabwe today.

While inflation was no longer running at 500 per cent (it was now deflating slightly), the Zimbabwean government had introduced what was called the 'mud' currency, that is, any currency, UK sterling, US dollar, South African rand can be used. But the banks don't have money to loan to business, production is low and 80 per cent of the working population is unemployed or employed in the 'informal' sector.'



Pay negotiations would be laughable if the situation were not so serious. 'You negotiate once a year,' said Gideon. 'We went to six months, then to one month, and finally had to negotiate for pay every day.' It's hard to imagine.

The railway infrastructure is 'completely dilapidated, signals are faulty,' the health sector has broken down and along with the challenge of HIV and AIDS, Zimbabwe faced a cholera outbreak last year which killed over 1,000 people.

ZARWU's national office has two out-of-date computers, no paper to photocopy and no way to buy any. If such resources were available, although union subscriptions are deducted by the companies, they are not passed on to ZARWU. To get any information out to activists, it was printed on one piece of paper, and sent by hand from one to the next and through the region. One piece of paper.

Gideon said publicity internationally was essential and the support and solidarity of TSSA was so much appreciated.

JANE LETHBRIDGE from the public services international research unit at the University of Greenwich, looks at the effects of privatisation and deregulation on public services. Jane said it was



'incredibly important to understand how multinational companies operate, particularly those moving into the public sector.' She spoke about three international threats facing public services:

- the effect of the internal market of the European Union, and the way that this particularly affects public services is by in a way determining whether public services are subject to competition
- the expansion strategies of multinational companies and the way that they move into new countries and new markets
- the development of the Global Agreement on

Trade and Services and other global trade agreements.

'European Commission language doesn't talk about public services, it talks about services of either general economic interest, which are subject to competition, or services of general interest which are not subject to competition. Rail services are included as services of general economic interest. International passenger transport opens up to competition from next year.

'For example,' said Jane, 'Veolia, the French company, is increasingly running national train systems and is involved in the UK with Firstgroup. MTR, which originally was set up to run the Hong Kong transit system by the Hong Kong government, became a private company, floated on the Hong Kong stock exchange in 2000, and became a partner in the London overground rail operation in 2007.'

Those in public services, including trade unionists, needed to understand company strategies for expansion across the world. That is why the role of the ITF was so crucial: to share experiences, to effect cross-border collaboration, and influence policy.

'In Europe,' Jane told reps, 'if companies have operations in two or more countries with a certain number of workers, they can set up a European Works Council. There are many examples of working with community groups to develop public services and protect them from privatisation – the 2002 doctors' strike in El Salvador to halt the privatisation of health brought in support from the solidarity networks developed as a result of the civil war in the 1990s.'

You need, Jane said, 'training for working internationally, resources, communications skills and, most importantly, the understanding that international solidarity changes and evolves and you have to change with that.' ◀◀

i *The full text of these speeches and others from the international speakers to conference will be available on the TSSA website.*

Workshop round-up

Thomas Cook

Glasgow and Larbert call centres plus the Scottish homeworkers' rep will launch a single TSSA branch with conference call facilities at meetings so homeworkers can take part. A campaigning branch structure will be built around Thomas Cook's ever-changing 'pay and rewards' policy.

Reps at Heathrow Terminal Five will run a recruitment campaign among foreign exchange bureaux staff and focus on securing a better facilities agreement for TSSA reps.

Vertex

Dingwall call centre reps will set up a branch to include homeworkers they aim to recruit in the region. A member questionnaire will find out the most convenient day/time for meetings, and issues. Issues identified include the company's absence policy and grading of posts.

Edinburgh Vertex reps will step up recruitment efforts in the run-up to the TUPE transfer of all staff to Trainline later this year.

TSSA learning

TSSA reps definitely caught the learning bug in Torquay, and interest was particularly high in Network Rail. Volunteers from around the country came forward to be ULRs and we plan to organise learning events in Reading and Waterloo. ▶

Workshop round-up

Irish public sector

Aim to establish better communication and solidarity between members north and south, analyse branch structures and target young members, recruitment drive based on TSSA being an organising and campaigning union that fights for workers' rights and reps to map workplaces.

Train operating companies (TOCs)

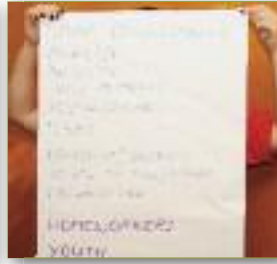
TOC reps agreed to map the workplace as a constant, to redevelop the branch system, start a campaign across companies where the parent company is the same, as well as explore in more detail company accounts, and use the accounts for bargaining, prepare for meetings with management as company has tendency to lie.

Network Rail (NR)

Appreciated time to network with other NR reps – wanted more of this. Focus on branches encouraging reps to get more involved and make branches proactive. Many straight back to workplaces to recruit! Whole group exercise helped everyone see where NR fitted into wider TSSA organisation.

TfL/London Underground/ British Transport Police

TfL responded to threat of privatisation after 2012 Olympics and possible change of government with plan to fight back. Identified need to work across London Transport, mapping workplaces, building effective communication network, company accounts needed closer scrutiny and Tubelines reps organised meeting to do so. ◀◀



A tale of *two* countries

A TWO COUNTRY workshop with reps from the north and south of Ireland working in what are still publicly run services was posed the question: what would happen if an international company came into both countries to take over all bus and train services? The border became irrelevant – or did it? As reps discussed the way forward, it was clear that different laws in the UK and Ireland could be used to the union's advantage.

Gerry Kennedy, Belfast branch, opened the workshop with a simple message: 'This is about what we can do to be organised and face any threats that could come under privatisation of the industry.'

Patrick McCusker, TSSA organiser based in the Dublin office at present, said that he would learn a lot from the reps there: 'We work together and share ideas.'

The reps seminar was about

unions in action. The reps were a core group who would affect the outcomes of real negotiations over the next few weeks. The work done in the two day workshops by all 170 TSSA reps would arm them with the tools they needed to win.

The information

Reps from Ulster Bus, Northern Ireland Railways, Dublin Bus, Bus Eireann were each given a company information pack.

The problem

'A large scale privatisation of rail and bus services in the north and south of Ireland is intended. We seek your support in developing a campaign against privatisation and Stagecoach, the probable buyer. Discuss all options.'

The questions

What is a public company? What would it mean Stagecoach coming in? What

had the company done internationally? Who owned it? What about the public and local communities?

Reps had to think about the timescale for privatisation, the possible job losses based on what Stagecoach had done in the past, did the company recognise unions and TUPE arrangements and what were the legal differences north and south?

The campaign

- Inform and involve staff and the public
- involve all unions affected into one negotiating body, and organise joint meetings for a combined union approach
- use TSSA resources in both Dublin and London for information
- win the support of community groups and local pressure groups as well as Irish TDs and UK MPs.

The next steps for all reps

This was the start of a collaborative organising approach based on finding out: WHAT THEY ARE, WHAT THEY WILL DO, WHAT WE WILL DO.

Reps went on to learn the skills they needed to conduct strategic corporate research using company accounts, employer mapping, workplace mapping as well as developing campaigns. ◀◀

