

For more than 100 years trades councils have played a crucial role in uniting the struggles in the workplace with those in the community for peace and social justice.

Trades Councils have been at the forefront of struggles for workplace justice, in the forefront of struggles against the racism and fascism that threatens our communities, in the vanguard of the battle for equal rights, for civil liberties and for trade union rights.

They have always been important – but their role today, in the face of a global economic crisis, in the face of mass unemployment, with the prospect of more and deeper cuts in public spending and public services and a draconian assault on welfare rights, in the face of European directives which drive privatisation and outsourcing, in the face of a global war on terror that threatens our rights and freedoms, in the face of a resurgent right and the threat they pose to our communities and in the face of a labour movement which all too often is too timid in its demands and too conservative in its actions - could not be greater.

CWU precursor of battles to come – vital trades councils are ready, willing and able to actively deliver the solidarity that will be necessary to ensure we can successfully defend our public services, our jobs and our rights.

I was enormously proud and honoured to have the chance to move the historic first motion from the Trades Union Council's conference at this year's TUC Congress. Trades Councils are back today where they belong – at the heart of our movement.

The motion in its call for solidarity with all workers made it clear, as unemployment hit 2.5m, as the numbers unemployed for over 6

months topped 1 million, as youth unemployment hit 16% and in the wake of predictions of jobless figures reaching 4 million, that just as mass unemployment was not a price worth paying under the Tories nor is it a price worth paying under New Labour.

It is not a price worth paying because we know, that behind every one of those grim unemployment statistics there is a human story – the fear of a new lost generation, the family driven apart by debt, the descent in to poverty, of communities wrecked, of homelessness and despair.

But it was not a motion which wallowed in despair but which builds hope through solidarity.

It is a motion that recognises that the fight against unemployment is not a question of resources but a question of political will. If the government can find £76bn for Trident, £33bn lost annually to tax avoidance, £6 billion for ID cards, billions for war and billions to bail out the banks they can afford fair benefits, provide stronger support for protecting our jobs, properly resource our health, education and other public services.

That we must be proactive and campaigning if we are to fight the consequences of a devastating recession and ensure that profitable companies cannot get away with using the crisis to cut jobs or to shift the burden of the crisis on to those who are its victims – through a draconian and shameful attack on the welfare rights of the most vulnerable in our society.

But this was above all also a motion - which alongside a call for an active campaigning strategy to tackle job cuts and the economic crisis - sets out a course of action to ensure all our movement, employed or unemployed workers, are guaranteed our solidarity.

In the face of the last recession the TUC worked with Trades Union Councils to establish Unemployed Workers Centres. These centres have continued to do magnificent work alongside unions locally helping to tackle the devastating impact job losses had on too many communities.

Yet, just at the point at which the millions of people's lives again risk being blighted by the consequences of mass unemployment, we have just 35 centres in England, down from a peak of 200 in 1986.

It is time for us once again to turn to our words of solidarity in to firm support for the TUC Unemployed Workers Centres – and for unions alongside county associations, the regional tucs to actively seek to establish ones where they are needed but don't exist, to build on the work already being done through the Active Unions, Active Communities project to support unions and their members in the face of the recession and to re-establish and promote the effective operation of a fund to provide a regular income from union branches and employed workers, building links between local workplaces and the Centres and , providing crucial financial support for the advocacy, advice and campaigning work of those centres. That is a task every trades council, every union can and should be involved in. Practical advice on how to do it will be coming.

Trades Councils, UWCs, trade unions in the community all have a vital role to play. It is they who must become central to the campaigning, they who our members rely on for assistance and they who must get support from the whole labour movement.

Alongside such campaigning activity we must reach out to all victims of this crisis – and in particular to migrant workers as part of our activities to tackle vulnerable employment, linking up with active community campaigns like Justice for

Cleaners, recognising the contribution made by migrant workers and their families to the economy and the pressure that the exploitation of those workers places on jobs, housing and pay

and link up with those local campaigns which call not for arbitrary targets, not for the false promise and petty nationalism enshrined in slogans such as british jobs for british workers, not for the policies of division but for action to end the pay and employment discrimination faced by migrant and other workers, for full employment rights from day one, for strict enforcement of the national minimum wage and for tougher penalties for those who breach it. And if we are to achieve such vital goals our trades councils and our unions need to turn out to migrant workers and launch a mass recruitment drive, to provide advice on health and safety and rights at work – some good work going on and we must build on it and put resources in to it, building direct links with migrant communities.

And we should heed the warning that unless we do, those who seek to sow division, to make political capital out of the pressures brought about by migration, those Nazis who dress themselves today in suits but remain Nazis start to crawl from out of the woodwork to spew their racist poison. Trades Councils have a vital role to play in uniting all those who stand for equal rights and against racism and fascism, bringing together not just the activists of the anti-racist, anti-fascist campaigns but building links with the trade union branches, with the community groups and with all those who stand for unity not division and of mobilising both at the ballot box but also in the protests and demonstrations and campaigns which can undermine the BNP and other Nazis.

Alongside the fight against the far-right the fight for economic and social justice is driven by environmental issues.

It is vital our trades councils put themselves at the heart of local campaigns – seizing organising opportunities and advancing our agenda both within workplaces and communities.

We've made big strides as unions recruiting environmental reps in the workplace developing our Greening the workplace agenda – but our role does not stop at the office door or factory gate. Within local communities and as an integral part of community campaigns we have a crucial awareness raising role to play, a campaigning role for better public transport, for mobilising for a move beyond the environmentally damaging model of working time and production – the misery of rush-hour commutes, traffic congestion and creaking public transport infrastructures, the misery of long hours and unpaid overtime, working late in to the evening burning lights and energy.

Trades councils can play a critical role in helping to mobilise workers by holding employers to account and by pressing local authorities and public bodies for change - we can make a real difference. Tackling global warming must become as much part of our core business as tackling poverty, injustice and inequality. In fact they all go together

Tough on exploitation, tough on the causes of exploitation.

Of course all that sounds well and good but how are we few in this room or the small numbers at our trades councils meetings to begin to build that movement for change. Let us be clear – it will not be easy. It will take hard work, energy,

commitment and organisation. But if we don't have that, who does?

We start in our workplaces and our communities helping build a unionisation drive - building support for disputes, solidarity between workers, generalising our actions, building links between workplaces and from the workplace to the community, taking our message in to schools and colleges, linking up with student and youth groups to combat the exploitation of young workers, making sure we are at the forefront of key local campaigns to defend council housing, to stop the privatisation of health or education facilities, to opposing job cuts in the civil service and defending public services. In short we make the trades council THE leading campaigning body locally able to add value to local campaigns –

using imaginative ways to secure support.

And so sporting and cultural events can be used to highlight the unions' message

to turn trades councils out to campaigns attracting students and young workers so vital to the future of our movement, targeting non-union workplaces as a movement, not individual unions,

organising high profile campaigning and stunts to highlight the importance of trade union rights and freedoms.

Such campaigns help to raise the profile of unions in general but more particularly the trades council.

And every campaign should be an organising opportunity.

Are the participants members of the relevant union. If not, recruit them. If they are, can they be encouraged to become active. Is their branch affiliated?

On a practical level we need to identify new reps, newly organised workplaces and encourage affiliations and more

than that secure their active participation in our campaigns and activities.

And we need to get better about publicity. Too many of us have no web presence. Too many of the web sites are out of date or poorly maintained. Too few of us are using social media or other means of reaching wider audiences.

Trades Council websites should become the one-stop shop for all labour movement campaigns and activities in the local area providing information, resources and above all inspiration.

Cdes our trades council movement has a proud history. We look to that past for inspiration but we cannot afford to simply wallow in nostalgia. The tasks before us are massive but they are vital. And with a looming general election they are to become more vital.

The most recent government survey showed the country's wealthiest 1% own 34% of the wealth and the top half own 93%. The least wealthy 50% own just 1% of the wealth.

One in 4 workers earn less than £12,000 a year, three-quarters less than £30,000. 85% of under-thirties have no pension provision and 9m under-50s are not saving in a pension.

So we need change.

Our objective cannot be simply to recapture the economy and society we had pre-crash, it must be about building locally, nationally, globally a society based on the needs of the majority not the greed of the minority.

Change comes from below. Community activity is the catalyst of change. The activity of trades councils in the community can be a defining factor in securing the change we want.