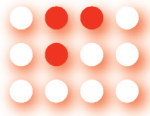


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Union political funds bring in more income

The number of members contributing to their union's political fund has fallen, but income and expenditure have risen, according to the latest annual report of the union watchdog, the Certification Officer.

Twenty five unions had political funds with 4,859,578 members paying into the fund – a decrease of 95,028 or 1.9% on the previous year's figure of 4,954,606. In most cases the Certification Officer's analysis covers 2014 and 2015, although unions may have since filed later annual returns.

Two unions – general union Unite and public services union UNISON – have over a million members paying a political levy: UNISON has 1,184,458 members and Unite 1,166,538.

The total income of the political funds of the 25 unions increased by 2.4% to £24.55 million from the £23.97 million the previous year.

Total expenditure was up by 3.8% to £20.65 million from £19.89 million the year before.

Five unions spent over £1 million in the period covered by the union watchdog's annual report. UNISON spent £5.57 million – almost a £1 million

less than the year before, while Unite's spending was marginally up to £4.85 million from £4.79 million. Both the GMB general union and shop and distribution workers' union Usdaw spent more. The GMB's spend was £3.13 million against £2.84 million and Usdaw's spend was £2.32 million against £2.01 million the previous year.

The CWU communication workers' union increased its spend by more than £½ million. The latest expenditure figure was £1.6 million – a 75.7% increase on the £907,879 the previous year.

The funds available in political funds grew over the year. For the 25 unions, the total was up to £33.03 million at the end of the year – a 13.4% rise on the £29.14 million at the start of the year.

The annual report lists the unions that balloted on a political fund during the year – PCS, NUM and UCATT – and all had Yes votes in excess of 90%.

As at 31 March 2016, there were 24 unions which had political fund resolutions in force – a net decrease of one from the number that was reported last year. The Society of Radiographers passed a new political fund resolution, but two unions ceased to have political funds. Unity ceased to exist as a result of its transfer of engagements to GMB and the mining union NACODS, notified the Certification Officer of the closure of its political fund.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/annual-report-of-the-certification-of-ficer-2015-2016

LABOUR RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

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Progress needed on transgender equality

Rather belatedly, the government has responded to the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee's report on transgender equality that was published in January 2016. The response, says the TUC's Touchstone blog, is "underwhelming."

The committee's wide-ranging report recognised that, despite welcome progress in recent years, our society is still failing to support the rights and interests of trans people. It noted that the earlier 2011 Advancing Transgender Equality action plan remained largely unimplemented, and they required the government to agree a new strategy, which it can deliver with full cross-departmental support, within six months.

Yet, the government response was bland, and non-committal. The tone, said Debbie Hayton writing on Touchstone, was marked by phrases such as "we will keep these issues under consideration", "we will continue to monitor the issue", and, when responding to issues of discrimination under the 2010 *Equality Act*, "we will keep this under review and will continue to listen to and monitor people's experiences of discrimination, harassment or victimisation".

However, monitoring does not equate to action and, while the government claims that transgender issues remain a priority, the promised action plan indicated further reviews rather than actual legislation to improve the lives of transgender people.

Discrimination against trans people in the workplace remains rife. Earlier this year, Total Jobs reported on a survey of trans employee experiences. Its findings were stark: 60% have experienced transphobic discrimination in the workplace, and 53% have felt the need to hide that they are trans from colleagues.

Over a third (36%) left a job because the environment was unwelcoming. Trans people face extra hurdles when finding work and, when they do secure work, they find that their careers can be hampered by employers reluctant to deploy them in public facing roles.

Hayton quotes two respondents to the survey: "I was turned down for a job as the employer was worried about what customers might think"; and, "My boss stopped sending me out on site after the transition". Discrimination can be hidden behind

comments such as "I'm sorry but on this occasion another candidate has something extra to offer", but it is still discrimination.

Evidence of discrimination is widespread and was also reported to the Women and Equalities Committee. It noted that, despite recent legislation, trans people still face discrimination in employment and other aspects of their lives. Even the scope of the *Equality Act* is unclear as the protected characteristic is gender reassignment, rather than gender identity or some other term that would definitely include non-binary and dual role people, said Hayton.

<http://touchstoneblog.org.uk/2016/07/government-must-tackle-discrimination-trans-people/>

Economy grows in second quarter

The UK economy expanded in the second quarter of the year, official figures show.

The economy, as measured by gross domestic product (GDP), is estimate to have increased by 0.6% in April-June quarter compared with growth of 0.4% in first quarter (January to March 2016).

The 0.6% growth figure is a preliminary estimate for the second quarter and will be firmed up later on.

Output increased in two of the main industrial groupings within the economy in the second quarter. Services increased by 0.5% and production output increased by 2.1%. However, the construction sector decreased by 0.4% and agriculture by 1.0%, according to the Office for National Statistics.

In the second quarter, GDP was 2.2% higher than the same quarter a year ago.

www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/bulletins/grossdomesticproductpreliminaryestimate/aprtojune2016

Green family used BHS as milch cow

A litany of failures culminating in a disposal of company "at any cost" to a wholly unsuitable "chancer" is detailed in a House of Commons select committee report on the failure of retail giant BHS.

In their report on BHS, the Work and Pensions and Business, Innovations and Skills Committees conclude that Sir Philip Green chose to rush through

the offloading of a beleaguered high street institution, losing money and encumbered with a massive pension fund deficit, to a buyer who he was clearly aware was “manifestly unsuitable”.

Though the ownership of Dominic Chappell and his associates was “incompetent and self-serving”, the ultimate fate of the company was sealed on the day it was sold by Green for £1, MPs said.

The report documents the systematic plunder of BHS at the cost of the 11,000 jobs and 20,000 people’s pensions now at risk. Sir Philip Green, Dominic Chappell and the respective directors, advisers and hangers-on who all got rich or richer are all culpable, with the only losers the ordinary employees and pensioners.

Green, who bought BHS for £200 million and sold it 14 years later for £1, could not disguise the true picture. He did not invest in the company and then unfortunately fail to make it succeed. Green systematically extracted hundreds of millions of pounds from BHS, paying very little tax and fantastically enriching himself and his family, leaving the company and its pension fund weakened to the point of the inevitable collapse of both. Lady Tina Green is still being paid tens of millions of pounds of tax free repayments on the loan that was engineered to sell BHS from one Green family business to another, and will be for some years to come.

Over the duration of the Greens’ tenure, significantly more money left the company than was invested in it. There is no evidence of improved turnover, market share, or major increase in investment that might be expected from a leading retailer. BHS was involved in a number of transactions with a complex web of companies, many registered offshore: whether BHS benefited financially from these transactions is far from clear. “What is clear is that the Green family did,” said the report.

The committees called this is “the unacceptable face of capitalism” and said that the story of BHS begs much wider questions about the gaps in company law and pension regulation that must be addressed. The two committees will now turn to these questions in new inquiries.

David Gill, national officer at the shopworkers’ union Usdaw, said: “It is clear that the rapid demise of the company is down to a handful of people who have been more interested in indulging in a game of corporate monopoly for their own personal gain. There are still some very serious questions that need to be answered, by former owners of the business, about how a company with decades of

history and experience in retail has now come to this very sorry end.”

Following the news that all remaining BHS stores will be closed by 20 August, Usdaw has called on the administrators to redouble their efforts in finding a buyer for the remaining stores and to secure as many jobs as possible.

www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/news-parliament-2015/bhs-report-published-16-17/
www.usdaw.org.uk/About-Us/News/2016/July/11,000-BHS-staff-left-devastated-as-Administrators?

Lack of progress on disability rights

A new national effort to promote disability rights is needed as “progress has stalled”, said David Isaac, chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

Isaac called for a new national focus on disability rights, so that disabled people are no longer treated as “second class citizens” in the EHRC’s response to the Lords Select Committee report on the *Equality Act 2010* and its effect on the lives of disabled people.

He called on the government to show stronger leadership by implementing all remaining provisions in the *Equality Act* without delay to allow better access to transport, housing and representation in politics for disabled people.

He has also called on restaurants, theatres, concert venues, sports stadia and all those providing services to raise their game so disabled people are not at a disadvantage. Businesses must use digitalisation as an opportunity to make it easier for disabled people to use their services online. Denying access to a large customer base simply is not good business practice and large venues must make it easier for disabled customers to access and buy tickets.

Isaac said: “It is a badge of shame for our society that thousands of disabled people are still not being treated as equal citizens and the everyday rights non-disabled people take for granted, such as being able to access transport, housing, restaurants, theatres and sporting events, are still being denied.

“Successive governments have failed to implement rights for disabled people in full, and now is the time to move this forward. Implementing the remaining provisions of the *Equality Act* relating to areas such as transport and reasonable adjust-

ments to common areas of rented houses would help put an end to this discrimination, increasing disabled people's independence and ability to participate in society."

The EHRC's response to the report also sets out the action it will take over the next year. Proposed action includes:

- a major inquiry to examine issues related to disabled people and housing;
- the most comprehensive research into all areas of disabled people's lives, covering different issues faced by people with different disabilities, as well as those with multiple protected characteristics (such as disabled members of ethnic minorities);
- a report on the impact of welfare reforms, with a particular focus on the issues faced by disabled people; and
- a report on the pay gaps disabled people face, with recommendations on the action that needs to be taken.

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/news/lack-progress-disability-rights-society%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98badge-shame%E2%80%99

Workers should take care in heat of the sun

The appearance of the sun and the rise in temperature has also brought out useful reminders for workers of the risks associated with exposure to solar radiation and how to keep cool.

The Institution of Occupational Health and Safety (IOSH) is running a campaign, called No Time to Lose, to raise awareness of cancer-causing agents, including solar radiation, and to provide advice on managing the associated risks.

It is estimated that malignant melanoma kills nearly 50 people each year in the UK because of exposure to solar radiation at work, with 240 new cases being registered, according to the research by Imperial College London.

As part of the campaign, IOSH has produced advice to help businesses and their employees follow simple measures which can be put in place to control the risks. There are many ways that the risks can be minimised, including:

- checking the UV index and communicating information to relevant workers, as well as prompting staff to use protective measures to minimise exposure. Action should be taken when the index is at three or above;
- avoiding outdoor work or minimising exposure to direct sunlight in the middle part of the day (60% of daily UV radiation occurs between 10am and 2pm. Many advise minimising exposure until at least 3pm); and
- wearing long-sleeved, loose-fitting tops and trousers when working outdoors.

Meanwhile, the TUC has called on employers to temporarily relax workplace dress codes so staff can work through any heatwave as comfortably as possible.

To keep work cool, the TUC would like to see employers introduce a number of measures including:

- the distribution fans to staff and provision of portable air cooling cabinets;
- allowing flexible working so that staff can have the option of coming in earlier and staying later to avoid the sweltering conditions of the rush hour commute;
- moving desks away from windows, drawing blinds or installing reflective film; and
- allowing staff to take frequent breaks and providing a ready supply of cool drinks.

For many years the TUC has been pushing for a change in safety regulations to introduce a new maximum indoor temperature. The TUC wants this set at 30°C – or 27°C for those doing strenuous jobs – with employers obliged to adopt cooling measures when the workplace temperature hits 24°C.

www.iosh.co.uk/News/IOSH-urges-workers-to-take-care-in-the-sun.aspx

www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-issues/health-and-safety/relax-workplace-dress-codes-help-staff-cope-heatwave-says-tuc

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