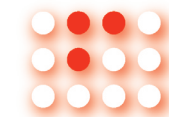


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New rates for voluntary Living Wage

New voluntary Living Wage rates for London and elsewhere were announced at the start of Living Wage Week.

The new rate for London, announced by London mayor Sadiq Khan on 31 October, is £9.75 an hour – a 3.7% increase on the 2015-16 rate of £9.40.

This year over 300 more London-based employers have signed up to pay their staff the hourly rate required to make ends meet in the capital, bringing the number of London Living Wage employers to almost 1,000.

The rate for elsewhere in the UK has also increased – by 2.4% from £8.25 to £8.45 an hour. The new UK rate is 17.3% higher than the statutory minimum wage rate – or National Living Wage – for over 25s which is £7.20 an hour.

The voluntary Living Wage is independently-calculated each year based on what employees and their families need to live. And the rates apply to all workers over 18 – in recognition that young people face the same living costs as everyone else.

In total, nearly 1,000 employers have signed up since Living Wage Week last year bringing the total

number of accredited Living Wage organisations to nearly 3,000.

New household names that have announced their commitment to pay the voluntary Living Wage include: Everton Football Club, the British Library, RSA Insurance Group, Curzon Cinemas and law firm DLA Piper International.

The announcement of the new rates came a day after new research showed that one in five people are still paid less than the voluntary Living Wage.

Some 5.6 million people in the UK are paid less than the voluntary Living Wage, constituting 22% of all working people, according to new estimates published by KPMG.

The research, conducted by Markit for KPMG, reveals that part-time jobs are three times more likely to pay below the voluntary Living Wage than full-time roles. Around 43% of part-time workers now earn less than the voluntary Living Wage, compared with around one-in-seven full-time workers (14%). Indeed, the difference is so stark that despite accounting for less than one-third of all UK jobs, there are more part-time roles paying less than the Living Wage (3.1 million) than full-time jobs (2.5 million).

Regionally, Northern Ireland has the highest proportion of people earning below the voluntary Living Wage at 27%, followed by the East Midlands at 26%. The lowest proportion is in London and

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the South East, both at 18%, followed by Scotland at 19%.

However, by number of people rather than proportion, London (722,000), the North West (643,000) and the South East (624,000) are the most affected areas.

www.livingwage.org.uk/news/new-real-living-wage-rates-announced-london-uk-0
<https://home.kpmg.com/uk/en/home/media/press-releases/2016/10/more-than-5-million-of-uks-working-population-still-being-paid-1.html>

Theatre of austerity

The general union Unite and its Community membership section have used the power of theatre to stimulate the debate about austerity Britain.

Writing on the Stronger Unions blog, John Earls, head of research at Unite, explained that the union is keen to explore different ways in which the union can reach beyond its traditional bases and extend the union message to new constituencies in new ways. Unite Community is part of that and this event, using the power of theatre to stimulate debate around issues of austerity, the social security system, low pay and precarious work, was an innovative and stimulating attempt to consider and develop alternatives.

Unite hosted the initiative at its London and Eastern office that combined the skills of theatre with trade union experience and the voices of communities to explore the pressing social issues facing the country and the potential for change.

The Great Austerity Debate is set around a new play, *A life in the week of Megan K*. It is the result of collaboration between the Menagerie Theatre Company and two academics from Cambridge University – Mia Gray and Susan Smith. The play centres around Megan Knowles, a single mother of two, as she tries to cope with working on a zero-hours contract, a deficient social security system and financial hardship.

The first half consisted of watching the play which featured powerful and moving performances from a trio of actors: Bianca Stephens, John Shields and Caroline Rippin.

But then the audience is invited to get involved. Firstly, to share their thoughts and observations on what they have just seen. Then, the actors return to the stage – still in character – and the audience asks the characters (not the actors) questions that help gain an understanding of their respective situations and personalities.

Finally, scenes are acted out again and the audience has the opportunity to raise their hand, shout “Stop!” and suggest a different course of action.

At one point one of the characters is asked by the audience “Why don't you join a trade union?” She replies “What's a trade union?” – a stark reminder that it's not just of the need to communicate the union message in a way that's relevant, but of the difficult environments unions have to work in.

There is also a level of democracy and engagement one doesn't usually get in traditional forms of theatre. This not only applies to the audience's active involvement but the venues used. These performances take place away from traditional theatres and in community centres and workplaces.

<http://strongerunions.org/2016/11/08/the-great-austerity-debate-using-the-power-of-theatre-unions-and-communities-to-explore-social-policy/>

Unions take on gig economy firms

Trade unions are using the courts to take on employers in the gig economy over the bogus self-employment of the workforce.

The GMB general union brought a tribunal case against ride-hailing app firm Uber on behalf of two drivers. And the London Employment Tribunal has determined that Uber has acted unlawfully by not providing drivers with basic workers' rights.

The tribunal decided that Uber drivers are entitled to receive holiday pay, a guaranteed minimum wage and an entitlement to breaks. The decision will have major implications for over 30,000 drivers in London and across England and Wales and for workers in other occupations.

The GMB found last year that a member working exclusively for Uber received just £5.03 an hour after costs and fees were taken into account, significantly below the National Living Wage of £7.20.

Lawyers for the drivers also argued that Uber acted unlawfully by frequently deducting sums from drivers' pay, often without informing the drivers in advance, including when customers make complaints.

Maria Ludkin, legal director at the GMB, said: “Uber drivers and thousands of others caught in the bogus self-employment trap will now enjoy the same rights as employees.”

It will come as no surprise that Uber is to appeal the ground-breaking decision.

Meanwhile, in a different line of attack on gig economy companies, the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) has written to Deliveroo's chief executive asking the firm to recognise it as a union representing riders in one area of London.

Currently, the riders are classed as self-employed contractors, and are not entitled to the rights available to workers, including sick pay and the National Living Wage. The firm's contract even tells those who sign up to make deliveries that they cannot test this status at the employment tribunal – although lawyers have dismissed this as unenforceable.

The request for collective bargaining, which will cover only those working in Camden, north London, is designed to force the company to acknowledge the riders as workers. Independent contractors are not able to request collective bargaining in this way.

The letter, from IWGB general secretary Jason Moyer-Lee to Deliveroo's founder and chief executive Will Shu, calls for the company to recognise drivers working in Camden, north London. The letter gives the company 10 days to respond, and says that if the request is refused or unanswered the union will go to the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC).

It adds: "Of course, for the CAC to entertain our request they will need to decide that Deliveroo drivers are 'workers' and not the 'independent contractors' you have bogusly deemed them to be."

www.gmb.org.uk/newsroom/GMB-wins-uber-case

www.theguardian.com/business/2016/nov/08/deliveroo-union-recognition-iwgb-camden-london-uber

Fall in tribunal claims

The TUC has condemned the huge cost of taking a tribunal which allows bad bosses to get away with discrimination and unfair treatment.

The number of working people challenging discrimination or unfair treatment at work has fallen by 9,000 a month since fees of up to £1,200 came in, according to a new TUC analysis.

The analysis shows that in 2012-13 – the year before tribunal fees were introduced – 16,000 people a month, on average, took a claim against their employer to tribunal.

But by 2015-16, the average number of people taking claims had dropped to 7,000 a month. This includes a drop of nearly three-quarters (73%) for unfair dismissal claims. And there have also been sharp falls in challenges over sex discrimination (71%), race discrimination (58%) and disability discrimination (54%).

The TUC says the figures show that a key mechanism to stamp out discrimination and stop unfair sackings is broken, allowing discrimination to "flourish unchecked".

In a prime example of government inaction, the Ministry of Justice was due to publish a review on the impact of fees by the end of 2015. However, nearly a year on, nothing has happened. The TUC says the review must be published urgently. It has also called on prime minister Theresa May and chancellor Phillip Hammond to abolish fees in the Autumn Statement, which will be presented to parliament on 23 November.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said: "The evidence is there for all to see. These fees – of up to £1,200, even if you're on the minimum wage – are pricing out thousands each month from pursuing cases."

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/equality-issues/industrial-issues/discrimination-work-al-lowed-%E2%80%9Cflourish-unchecked%E2%80%9D-employment>

Factory output down in third quarter

Manufacturing output fell by 0.9% in the third quarter of the year, the first three-month period after the EU referendum vote.

There were big falls of 7.5% in output in the drugs industry, a 2.5% fall in electrical equipment and a 2.2% cut in transport equipment.

On the other hand, there was a welcome 4.8% increase in the output of textiles.

Manufacturing output was 0.5% higher than the same period a year ago, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said.

The more volatile monthly figure showed output in September was up by 0.6% on the previous month.

Britain's manufacturers are set to pare back their investment in plant and machinery over the next two years in response to increased uncertainty

about the demand outlook, according to a major annual survey of manufacturers published by the EEF manufacturers' organisation and Santander.

In addition, a hefty spike in political uncertainty since the EU referendum, the highest in the history of the survey, has added another layer of complexity to manufacturers' investment plans. This double whammy of demand and political uncertainty has inevitably introduced a note of caution to manufacturers' investment decisions.

According to the ONS, output of the production industries – manufacturing, mining and utilities – was 0.5% down on the previous quarter, but 1.0% higher than a year ago.

The more volatile monthly figure showed industrial production in September was down by 0.4% on the previous month.

www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/output/bulletins/indexof-production/sept2016

<https://www.eef.org.uk/about-eef/media-news-and-insights/media-releases/2016/nov/investment-to-slow-as-post-brex-it-uncertainty-and-demand-outlook-bites>

Two families win in courts over bedroom tax

The country's highest court, the Supreme Court, has ruled that the government discriminated against a disabled woman and her husband and a severely disabled child who needs overnight care through the implementation of the "bedroom tax".

The judgment found that the government acted unlawfully against Jacqueline Carmichael and her husband and full-time carer, Jayson, after their housing benefit was reduced by 14%, following the implementation of the bedroom tax.

Because of her disabilities she can't share a bedroom with her partner. Under the bedroom tax

regime, her family isn't entitled to benefit for an extra room although a child in the same situation would be.

The Supreme Court said that the difference in treatment between children and adults was a breach of the human rights not to be discriminated against (Article 14) and the protection of family and private life (Article 8). The policy was "manifestly without reasonable foundation".

Lord Toulson, one of the five judges, said: "I cannot, with respect, see a sensible reason for distinguishing between adult partners who cannot share a bedroom because of disability and children who cannot do so because of disability."

This means that the part of the bedroom tax scheme which affected Mrs Carmichael will be struck down – the government will have to revise the scheme to make it fair to adults with disabilities.

The Supreme Court also dismissed the government's appeal in the case of Paul and Susan Rutherford who provide around-the-clock care for their disabled grandson and who have a third bedroom for overnight carers.

The Rutherfords had successfully challenged the bedroom tax scheme in the Court of Appeal which held the policy unlawfully discriminates against children with disabilities who need overnight care.

While these two families were successful, claims brought by a further five families were dismissed.

Since April 2013, people in the social rented sector deemed to have one spare bedroom have had their housing benefit reduced by 14% and people deemed to have two, or more, spare bedrooms have had their housing benefit reduced by 25% under the hated bedroom tax regime.

www.leighday.co.uk/News/News-2016/November-2016/Supreme-Court-rules-Government-acted-unlawfully-ov
<http://rightsinfo.org/bedroom-tax-breaches-human-rights-laws-says-supreme-court/>

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