

## Defending Trade Union Facility Time

Conference notes the January 2012 launch meeting of the Trade Union Reform group whose stated aim is that public bodies should not pay for time spent by employees on trade union activity. This is just the latest group following on the heels of the constant attacks by the Tax Payer's Alliance and at last year's Conservative party conference, Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government described "tax-payer funded union officials as a "non-job" and Francis Maude MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office, announced that the Government intended to address the number of union reps in the civil service on full time release to perform union duties

The Freedom of Information Act has been used by a number of organisations to question trade union facility time across the public sector. Conference knows that these actions are part of an attempt to undermine and weaken trade unions' legitimate role in the workplace.

Trade Union Facility Time is a crucial union resource and if seriously undermined could seriously jeopardise the ability of the unions to represent members effectively.

We know that we will have many struggles on pay, pensions and other members' rights and benefits in the months and years to come and we need to be able to defend our members' interests across the public sector.

The TUC, in its October 2011 report "The Facts about Facility Time for Union Reps" stated that "Despite the fact that a number of union representatives do receive paid time off, this is often insufficient to allow them to carry out all of their trade union duties and many union reps use significant amounts of their own time. In a survey carried out by the TUC in 2005, 16 per cent of union reps said that less than quarter of the time they spent on union duties was paid for by their employer. The BERR survey referred to earlier also found that reps in the public sector contribute up to 100,000 unpaid hours of their own time each week".

Conference notes the publication of UNISON's branch Guidance on Facility Time and welcomes its advice on negotiating time off for reps, use of email and IT facilities, dealing with FOI requests etc.

Conference calls on the National Executive Council to build on research by the TUC and fellow trade unions and mount a robust campaign on the protection of facility time and to:

1. Promote to the public the benefits of the provision of facility time;
2. Monitor closely the activities of governments and employers for any attempt to deny or undermine such provision;
3. Defend the statutory right of union representatives to facility time and
4. Defend current facilities agreements.