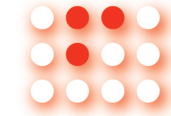


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Local government workers' strike

UNISON's industrial action committee has confirmed that strike action by local government workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will go ahead on 16 and 17 July. The decision follows a ballot 55% to 45% in favour of action.

"Throughout the union and across the country our members working in local government have given sustained strike action the green light," said UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis.

The action affects 600,000 of the union's local government members, including social workers, librarians, surveyors and teaching assistants. They will walk out to protest against this year's below-inflation pay offer of 2.45%.

They will be joined by members of the Unite general union who have voted by three to one in favour of strike action. Nearly 40,000 members who provide services in school catering, social care, refuse and environmental services across the UK, except for Scotland, will now strike.

Peter Allenson, Unite national organiser for the public sector, said: "It is simply unfair and untrue to accuse public sector workers of stimulating

price rises. Low paid local government workers are more likely to be the victims rather than the cause of rising inflation."

www.unison.org.uk/news/news_view.asp?did=4469
www.amicustheunion.org/default.aspx?page=8663

Worker fatalities

The provisional figure for the number of workers fatally injured in 2007-08 is 228, according to the Health and Safety Executive. That is down 19 on the finalised figure of 247 for the year before.

The industrial sector figures with the rate of deaths per 100,000 workers and trends were as follows.

In agriculture there were 39 fatal injuries and the rate of fatal injury was 9.1 deaths per 100,000 workers. The rate of fatal injury to workers has fluctuated in recent years with no overall trend.

Construction suffered 72 fatalities and the rate of fatal injury was 3.4 deaths per 100,000 workers. Although the last 15 years overall has shown a downward trend in the rate of fatal injury to workers, the recent five years has shown little change, with an average yearly rate of 3.6.

In manufacturing there were 34 fatal injuries and the rate of fatal injury was 1.1 per 100,000 workers. The rate of fatal injury to workers has fluctuated

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in recent years with no overall trend. The five-year average rate is 1.2 per year.

There were 74 fatalities in the services sector, and the rate of fatal injury was 0.3 deaths per 100,000 workers. Since 1998-99, the trend in the rate of injury in this sector has remained relatively unchanged.

Construction union UCATT said that the annual workplace fatality figures "make grim reading and "should serve as a wake up call to the construction industry and the Health and Safety Executive".

Alan Ritchie, general secretary of UCATT, said: "Every one of these deaths is an individual tragedy for a family who has lost a loved one. Most of these deaths were entirely preventable. Unfortunately too many people in the construction industry consider that deaths and serious injuries are almost an occupational hazard."

www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/fatals.htm
www.ucatt.info/content/view/516/30/

Pension scheme finances

Defined benefit – or final salary – pension schemes in the private sector are collectively in surplus, according to the latest monthly report from the Pension Protection Fund.

The aggregate funding position – total assets less total liabilities – of almost 7,800 defined benefit (DB) funds is estimated to have improved a little further in May 2008, rising to a surplus of £53.4 billion, from a surplus of £30.3 billion in April. However, scheme funding is substantially worse than a year ago when there was a surplus of £126.1 billion – a £72.7 billion deterioration in 12 months.

The number of schemes in deficit in May 2008 stood at 4,991, down from an estimated 5,271 schemes in April, and represented nearly two-thirds (64%) of total DB schemes in the sample. But the numbers were around 1,000 more than the 3,947 schemes in deficit in May 2007.

The total deficit of those schemes in deficit in May is estimated to have improved slightly to £45.7 billion from £55.5 billion at the end of April 2008. But the deficit is almost double what it was a year ago when it was £23.8 billion.

The number of schemes in surplus was higher in May 2008 at 2,753 than the April figure of 2,473 and

accounted for over a third (36%) of the schemes – a year earlier 3,797 were in surplus.

In May 2008, the total surpluses of schemes in surplus was up to £99 billion from £85.9 billion at the end of April. A year ago, the aggregate surplus of the schemes in surplus stood at £149.9 billion.

www.pensionprotectionfund.org.uk/ppf_7800_june_08.pdf

Going global

Unite, the UK's biggest union and the United Steelworkers, the largest private sector union in the USA and Canada, have signed an agreement creating the first global union.

The union, to be called Workers Uniting, will represent three million working people from every industrial sector in Britain, Ireland, the USA, Canada and the Caribbean.

The agreement to form a global union was initiated by the leaders of the two unions in response to the challenges of globalisation. In particular, the casualisation of employment and reductions in pay and conditions for millions of working people in North America and Europe.

A year in the making, the agreement will lead to the synchronisation of collective bargaining in companies with operations on both sides of the Atlantic.

It will also enable joint political campaigning. Unite is the Labour Party's biggest affiliate and donor and the USW is a major contributor to the Democrats in the USA and New Democrats in Canada.

Derek Simpson, joint general secretary of Unite, said that "formidable" power of multinational companies meant they were "able to play one nation's workers off against another to maximise profits".

"With this agreement we can finally begin the process of closing that gap," he added.

www.amicustheunion.org/default.aspx?page=8690

Production/GDP

A slowdown in the economy is feeding into official figures. Manufacturing output in the latest three months fell by 0.2% compared with the previous three months, according to the Office for National

Statistics. Machinery and equipment-making industries suffered a 1.5% fall in output.

Manufacturing output in the latest three months was 0.1% lower than the same period a year ago.

In the three months to May, the output of the production industries, which includes oil and energy, fell by 0.5% compared with the previous three months.

Output of the production industries was also 0.5% lower than the same period a year ago.

GDP The economy grew by 0.3% in the first quarter of the year against the final quarter of 2007 and growth was 2.3% higher than the same period a year ago. Both figures have been revised downwards from 0.4% and 2.5% respectively.

www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/iop0708.pdf
www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/qna0608.pdf

Inward investment to the UK

The annual inward investment results for 2007-08 showcase another highly successful year for the UK, with a record 1,573 investment projects won in what marks a fifth consecutive year of growth.

According to the figures, published by UK Trade & Investment, over 120 new jobs were created each day as a result of this investment from overseas companies, bringing employment and wealth to every area of the country.

Other highlights of the *UK Inward Investment 2007-08* report include:

- total projects up by 10% to 1,573 from 1,431;
- 45,051 new jobs created and a further 58,488 safeguarded, bringing the total number of associated jobs to 103,539 – up 32% on the year before;
- 653 (42%) of the total were new projects and 436 (28%) of the total were expansions by existing investors;
- R&D operations increased by 83% to 251 projects, with high value and R&D intensive projects representing two-thirds of the total;
- advanced engineering projects rose by nearly two-thirds (61%) to 182 projects;
- environmental technologies projects increased by over a fifth (22%) to 59; and
- though there has been a slight softening in last year's record figure, the US remains our biggest investor – representing some 30% of the total

investment projects, and almost 30,000 new and safeguarded jobs.

Trade and investment minister Lord Digby Jones said the figures “reflect our continued ability to punch above our weight on the global stage”.

UK Inward investment 2007-08		
Project nature	No of projects	Jobs (new/safeguarded)
Services	660	21,576
Manufacturing	276	41,835
HQ	231	3,012
R&D	251	16,893
Distribution	91	9,643
Contact Centres	50	6,248
E-Commerce	14	1,332
Totals	1,573	100,539

www.newsroom.uktradeinvest.gov.uk/index.asp?PageID=2&PressReleaseID=958

BBC fat cats

The annual pay bill of executive directors of the BBC rose by 16.7% in the year to March 2008, according to its latest annual report.

Director general Mark Thompson declined to take an annual bonus, but still saw his pay rise by 3.6% to £816,000 a year.

Two other directors were on over £500,000 a year. Deputy director general Mark Byford got a £41,000 annual bonus which helped his salary rise by 17.4% to £513,000. And director of Vision, Jana Bennett got a 23.8% rise taking her to £536,000 a year, including a £23,000 bonus.

Ashley Highfield, director of BBC Future and Media, got the biggest pay rise – 29.8% – and moved up to £466,000 a year. His annual bonus was £34,000.

John Smith, chief executive of BBC Worldwide, got the biggest bonus – £88,000 – and his total pay rose by 5.7% to £486,000.

Zarin Patel and Caroline Thompson, respectively group finance director and chief operating officer, had the same pay packet last year with £440,000 each. Patel's rise was 14.0% and Thompson's 21.9% and their annual bonuses were £31,000 and £32,000 respectively.

Jenny Abramsky, director of audio and music, received £419,000 including a £19,000 bonus and £61,000 cash supplement to replace her pension payments. Her overall pay rise was 27.4%.

Tim Davie, director of marketing and communications, propped up the rest of the board on £413,000, including a £17,000 bonus and only got a 1.7% rise.

Media unions have criticised the executives who took their bonus. BECTU general secretary Gerry Morrissey said that it was "astonishing" that the executive directors took their bonuses, when BBC staff have had to endure the loss of almost 2,000 jobs in the past year.

BECTU also pointed to the fact that the annual report is also silent on the BBC's attitude to talent costs, which have rocketed in recent years, leaving the BBC open to claims of being a soft touch where talent are concerned.

NUJ broadcasting organiser Paul McLaughlin said: "In a period where BBC staff have seen their workloads increase and jobs cut, it is shameful that the executives at the corporation have awarded themselves such huge bonuses.

"Management should have the decency to show restraint at a time when so many BBC staff are under huge pressures following major cutbacks."

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/annualreport/>
<http://www.bectu.org.uk/2008/07/08/bectu-slams-bbc-executive-pay/>
www.nuj.org.uk/innerPage/nuj.html?docid=866

Occupational pension schemes 2007

The active membership of employer pension schemes fell slightly between 2006 and 2007, according to the Office for National Statistics.

It said the number of people paying in to defined benefit or final salary and money purchase or defined contribution in the past year with dropped from 9.2 million to 8.8 million – a fall of 0.4 million. Private sector members fell 0.4 million to 3.6 million, while public sector numbers rose by 0.1 million to 5.2 million.

In 2007 the provisional estimate of the total number of schemes was 54,114 which is 5,391 lower than the revised 2006 figure of 59,505.

The number of open schemes fell by 3,917 over the period while the number of closed schemes increased by 781.

The total number of private sector schemes in 2007 was 53,801 (against 313 public sector schemes).

The number of private sector schemes was 5,389 lower than the revised 2006 figure. The number of open schemes reduced by 3,915 between 2006 and 2007, while the number of closed schemes increased by 773.

In 2007 around 75% of the active members in private sector schemes were in defined benefit schemes or sections of such schemes – 2.7 million out of 3.6 million in total.

Open schemes accounted for over half (56%) of the total active membership of private sector schemes – 2 million out of 3.6 million. Within open schemes, nearly two-thirds (65%) of the active membership was in defined benefit schemes – 1.3 million out of 2 million.

Within closed schemes, 93% of the active membership was in defined benefit schemes – 1.4 million out of 1.5 million.

Of the traditional final salary schemes in the private sector, ones that are closed to new recruits now hold more contributing members – 1.4 million people – than those that are still open – 1.3 million people.

www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/opss0708.pdf

Uncollected council tax in Wales

Welsh billing authorities failed to collect nearly £37 million in council tax in the financial year ending March 2008, figures have shown. In 2007-08, for Wales as a whole, the total amount of council tax billed was £977.8 million and of this total, £944.8 million had been collected by 31 March.

Figures published by the Welsh Assembly show that the overall collection rate for council tax was 96.6% in the last financial year – the same rate as in 2006-07. Collection rates ranged from 98.8% in Powys down to 94.4% in Cardiff.

The provisional figures show that nine out of 22 authorities have improved on their 2006-07 in-year collection rate figures; four councils showed the same collection rate. The remaining nine councils showed slight decreases of 0.1% or 0.2%.

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/statsdocs/locgov/sdr101-2008.pdf?lang=en>