

Does working-class education have a future?

A day conference for all trades unionists including Union Learn reps, trade union branch officers, TUC/ Trade Union Studies tutors, WEA/adult education lecturers, and mature students, organised by Trade Union Solidarity magazine and Bridgwater Trades Union Council

11am to 4pm, Saturday 2nd August
GWRSA/Railway Club, Wellington Rd,
Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 5HA

Speakers:

Marie Hughes South West TUC Regional Education Officer

Trish Lavelle CWU National Education Officer

Becca Kirkpatrick Co-editor Trade Union Solidarity

Shan Maidment TU studies tutor, City of Bristol College

Carole Vallelly GMB Southern Region/TUC tutor

Nigel Costley, Secretary, South West TUC

Dave Chapple, Bridgwater TUC

Ian Manborde, Ruskin College

Richard Ross London Metropolitan University

Cost is £5 per person which includes buffet lunch. Places are limited: please register in advance if possible, make cheques out to "Bridgwater Trades Union Council" and send to Dave Chapple, Conference Organiser, 1 Blake Place, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 5AU. Further details phone 07707 869 144 or e-mail davechapple@btinternet.com

Programme

10.30am to 11am: registration tea and coffee

11am: welcome: Vicki Nash, Somerset NUT and President Bridgwater TUC

11.05am: First session: Chair, Andy Newman, GMB, White Horse (Wiltshire) TUC

Speakers: Marie Hughes, Trish Lavelle, Dave Chapple

11.50am: discussion

12.30pm: Second session: Chair, Glen Burrows, RMT, Bridgwater TUC

Speakers: Nigel Costley, Shan Maidment, Richard Ross

1.15pm: discussion

2PM BUFFET LUNCH AND LICENSED BAR

2.40pm: Third session: Chair: Richard Capps, PCS, vice-Chair South West TUC

Speakers: Carole Vallelly, Ian Manborde, Becca Kirkpatrick

3.25pm: discussion including conference follow-up

4pm: Close of conference

The last few generations have seen, overall, both a crisis and decline in the general field of what used to be called working-class education. Despite substantial government Union Learn funding, now of course under severe pressure, and some impressive internal trade union shop steward programmes, the subsidised and 'liberal' 'adult education sector where many of us learned the theory and practice of socialism has almost disappeared.

This conference is a ground-breaking attempt to address this crisis, asking these questions amongst many others: would the internet have destroyed adult 'liberal' education without any government cuts? Do any trade unions educate their members for socialism or merely effective trades unionism? Can a volunteer/community-led strategy restore cuts to Union Learn and adult evening courses?

What about the left-wing political parties, including Labour and the Greens? What are the strategies to restore a once-thriving Independent Working Class Education as part of the workers' emancipation project? Do TUC courses succeed in teaching solidarity between workers in different unions? Could local trades councils play a new educational role?

These of course are only a few possible ways of approaching our conference subject: make sure you raise yours! Our speakers will all, hopefully, give us personal reflections of all their years teaching workers, as well as their own ideas for future education campaigns.

Bridgwater GWRSA/Railway Club is 100 yards from Bridgwater rail station at the east end of Wellington Rd. Car parking in adjacent station car park. Bridgwater station is served by an hourly train service throughout the day, arriving from Bristol at 40 minutes past the hour and from Taunton at 15/20 minutes past the hour. Bridgwater is also easily accessible from the M5 motorway with two junctions: north (Dunball/Junction 23) and south (Huntworth/Junction 24). The GWRSA/railway club itself is one of the national network of railway clubs which in themselves are an important part of working-class history-they were funded by the employers, and so can be understood both as social concession or dangerous palliative.

However, you will find the Bridgwater GWRSA a friendly, thriving but last-surviving local working class club. We look forward to seeing you on 2nd August!