

**PASSENGER
TRANSPORT SECTOR**

Plymouth Tories to sell off local bus firm


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**SPECIAL
EDITION**

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TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS' FESTIVAL
175TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION
FRIDAY 17 TO 19 JULY 2009

Passenger News

**A MESSAGE FROM
GRAHAM
STEVENSON,
NATIONAL
ORGANISER**

National Organiser for Transport, Graham Stevenson, who has fought against deregulation and privatisation for the T&G, and now Unite, for over a quarter of a century, has written widely on the effects of what was initially a Margaret Thatcher move to rid the country of council-owned bus firms. He explained: "Cities that don't have a council owned bus company have all seen their fares rise much higher

than they are in Plymouth. Thanks to the national scheme, pensioners will continue to travel for free, but everyone else will see fares rise if Citybus is privatised. The Council will also lose Citybus profits. It makes no sense from the point of view of a passenger or worker."

Buyers of Plymouth City Bus line up within hours

Within hours of the Tory council in Plymouth announcing that it was looking into selling its wholly owned local firm City Bus, both First Devon & Cornwall and a local taxi company boss expressed interest in acquiring the company. Marc Reddy, managing director of First Devon and Cornwall, said: "We're always interested in opportunities to expand our business in the South West."

The 485 staff members were told of the proposal at about 6am on May 21st, just before starting work. No guarantees over their future have been given. The timetable suggests that the full council will have the final decision, with the company possibly being offered for sale by the autumn.

Council leader Ms Vivien Pengelly claims that "Plymouth CityBus will not be sold unless a sensible offer is put forward. This process will simply see us testing the market to see what it's worth. Running a bus company is not core council business ... it would be irresponsible not to find out exactly what our assets are worth and to do that, we need to offer it to the market."

Support from across UK from council bus workers

Following the holding of a conference of activists from council-owned bus companies from across Britain, support for raising the profile of the campaign at a national level has emerged.

Messages of support have poured in from union activists and local campaigners in more than a dozen local authority owned bus companies across the country. A possibility of a major demonstration in Plymouth is being considered to which union activists from all over Britain would be asked to attend. E-mail messages to: peterthorpetgwu@yahoo.co.uk

All down to Tolpuddle!

Come to Tolpuddle in July to join the first protest. We'll be lining up behind the special "SAVE OUR PLYMOUTH BUS" banner and want as many busworkers to attend as possible to show solidarity.

Organised by the TUC, this festival takes place in the village of Tolpuddle, Dorset and takes place from Friday 17th until Sunday 19th July. There's a fearsome line up of entertainment laid on and lots of debate and discussion. It's a family day out with stalls and games and all sorts of things. But come mainly for the procession to show solidarity with Plymouth Citybus! Full details on the TUC website:

http://www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/tuc-16170-f0.pdf

THERE'S A GREAT LINE UP OF ENTERTAINMENT AT TOLPUDDLE, MAKING A BRANCH VISIT THERE NOT ONLY ENJOYABLE BUT WORTH A VISIT TO EXPRESS SOLIDARITY WITH PLYMOUTH: HERE'S THE DETAILS FOR THE MAIN SUNDAY JULY 19TH EVENT.....



Sunday Main Stage

12.30pm
Speakers including **Shella Bearcroft**
TUC President

1pm
The Shee
An exceptional band with an adventurous brew of Scottish folk, Gaelic song, and bluegrass that has earned them fast growing recognition.

1.45pm
Tribute to the Martyrs

2pm
Grand Procession led by the **Great Western Jazz Band**

3pm
Speakers including **Brendan Barber**
TUC General Secretary
Cuban trade unionist
and of course **Tony Benn**

3.30pm
Trans-Global Underground
Born in the early 90s, their influence is all over the place. More of a club than a group, they have a reputation for flamboyant live shows.

4.30pm
Billy Bragg
A warm welcome return to Tolpuddle's favourite.

5.30pm
Join the end of festival party with the **Clay Faces** in the Martyrs' Marquee

11am
Raices Cubanas
Part of the Cuba's 'nueva generacion', Raices Cubanas infuse strong vocals with Afro-Cuban jazz. An exciting new dance sound in Cuban music that will mark 50 years of the revolution.

11.50am
The Village Band
Andy, Lucy and Kate have played together for 20 years in kitchens, sessions and bands. The Village Band formed with the arrival of Simon and Barney.

Cuba 50

with Cuban band **Paseo Malanga and Eastington Band**

Greens say don't sell

Roger Creagh-Osborne, the Green Party spokesman for Plymouth and Cornwall has said that his party is sceptical.

"It's far more appropriate to keep City Bus in public ownership and manage it for the good of the city. The impact on passengers and fares could be less than beneficial. It's really cutting off their nose to spite their face. They have a very useful resource for the city in the form of City Bus. Plymouth City Council needs to manage it for the good of the city and not simply let it go to pay off debts."

Plymouth City Bus is profitable

Public transport is also one of the few areas of employment to benefit from an economic downturn. Yet this is a reason for the Tory council to consider sale since interest buying it may well be strong.

Ridiculously, the council has claimed that there are *"likely to be benefits for CityBus staff if a large commercial company was their employer, as working for a big company has benefits that we simply can't offer, for example, share schemes or opportunities to travel and work elsewhere."* It's news to some 90,000 members of Unite working for private employers!

Privatisation has seen widespread loss of benefits and pay but Plymouth City Bus has not only kept employment standards high, it has done this by keeping a reasonably decent public service *and* providing the city with a modest profit in the bargain. Basically, Plymouth citizens have a bus service at no cost to themselves. Even fare prices, though still ludicrously high, are lower than they would be with private company ownership.

Elsewhere in Britain, many bus workers lost signing on/sign off time, a standard day, a standard week, paid meal breaks, sick pay from day one, sick pay at basic rate, time and a third for holidays, overtime at time and half, Saturday basic pay of time and half, five minutes stand time between journeys, walking time to a vehicle reduced, one rate of pay for all drivers, and many other things.

Selling off the firm will surely lead to a reduction in services to the community

and bus routes being lost. It's even going to cost the people of Plymouth. The council cabinet is to agree to spend up to £940,000 of public money to investigate selling the company.



Remember this?

The badge that many of us used to campaign against Margaret Thatcher's break up of the bus industry is back. Order some for your own use by contacting us now.

Campaign underway

The campaign to keep Plymouth Citybus publicly owned says the sale will be "an insult to the workforce and management". Unite regional officer Clayton Roberts says: "We are bewildered as to why Plymouth City Council are willing to sell off such an asset. It is an insult to the workforce and management who have all worked extremely hard to make CityBus the commercial success it is today."

An early demonstration of the campaign was staged at the depot, where Devonport Labour MP, Alison Seabeck, called for "reassurances that services will be protected and price hikes avoided, as has been seen in other cities where bus services have been privatised," the Labour MP said.

Conservatives promised not to sell Citybus during the 2007 City Council election campaign. Now they are: "Mealy mouthed skinflints"

Given the chance to bid for Government funding to run a pilot project to offer all primary school children in the city with a free school meal each day, the Conservative-led Council turned this down without a word to parents, schools or anyone.

Unite's Deputy General Secretary, Jack Dromey, was scathing in his attack on Tory council bosses: "What a shower of mealy-mouthed skinflints these people are. The people of Plymouth don't deserve this. Taking up a Government grant would have seen local children provided with a healthy hot meal every day."

The grant would have been worth £100 to every household with a child under 11, £200 if you count the council matched funding. In these difficult times, the Tories have turned their back on thousands of parents in the city. But they have shown their true nature in being willing to offload our bus company to the first monopoly business to sling them a few million.

What's worse is that the people of Plymouth will have to pay to give their bus company away to private sector bus bosses.

The Conservative-led council cabinet has agreed to spend up to £940,000 of public money to privatise the bus company Citybus.

"Why should it cost us a million quid to find out how much Citybus is worth when all they have to do is look at the balance sheet?"

The "Business Ratio report", published by Keynote Ltd. only a few weeks ago, is a respected bus industry financial comparison study. It reports this of Citybus: The company is 68th on a league table of over a hundred bus companies in asset value. Its total assets in the most recently filed accounts show a value of £10,164,000.

Is this what they want the money for?

Failing to recover public money tied up in Icelandic banks has blown a big hole in Plymouth City Council's financial safety net. The £13 million frozen in collapsed institutions equals almost 90% of the total reserves set aside by the local authority.

The Audit Commission, the public watchdog on finance, has pointed out that some local councils missed crucial warning signs about Iceland's deteriorating banks, saying that councils with large sums at risk tended to have "weak governance and scrutiny arrangements". The spending watchdog says they were "overly dependent" on external advice and "failed to consider adequately the risks associated with their decisions". Those councils that did not have investments in Icelandic banks "...generally had more effective governance and scrutiny arrangements and took more measured approaches to managing risk". Between January and September 2008 a number of credit rating agencies downgraded their ratings on Icelandic banks and that this should have prompted council treasury managers to review the creditworthiness of the banks. The Audit Commission points out that *most* councils heeded the warning signs.

Is Citybus, its employees and passengers, now to pay for the mess that this Tory council has landed itself in? £13 million might just be what they are looking for!

Plymouth City Council says it will use the receipts of sale of Citybus to add to its normal service spending. But the sale of Citybus will likely bring in only around 2% of its total annual expenditure of over £600 million and be a pittance towards what's really needed. What is this all really about?

**E-mail blitz on Tories:
Tell them what you think**

The city council has six representatives on the board of PCB, *every single one of them a Conservative councillor*. Tell them your view by contacting them now:

michael.foster@plymouth.gov.uk

david.viney@plymouth.gov.uk

jonathan.drean@plymouth.gov.uk

ted.fry@plymouth.gov.uk

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[Councillor David Stark](#)

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