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Labour stalwart to head Burston rally

25 July 2007

MUSICIAN Billy Bragg will be joining Labour stalwart Tony Benn and trades union delegates in celebrating the 90th anniversary of the opening of Burston Strike School building.

The rural community near Diss was the scene of the longest strike in history, lasting 25 years, which is commemorated with an annual rally and parade of union banners around the village in September.

In April 1914, pupils walked out of the village school in protest at the sacking of much-loved and respected teachers Kitty and Tom Higdon for their socialist and political views.

The couple continued giving lessons, initially in the open air on the green, until enough money was raised through a national appeal for a permanent strike school building which opened in 1917.

Run by the Higdons and villagers until 1939, it offered parents a choice of where to educate their children, and is now a museum dedicated to the strike.

This year's rally takes place from 11am-4.30pm on Sunday, September 2, with guest speakers Bob Crow, RMT general secretary; Tony Benn, Professor Mary Davis, labour and feminist historian, and Collette Cork-Hurst, national secretary for equalities, Unite, T and G Section.

Billy Bragg - renowned for his blend of folk, punk rock and protest songs with political themes - will be the star of the afternoon's live music session.

A spokesman for the rally organisers said: "Times change but the struggle in rural areas for economic and social justice continues.

"This year at Burston, we highlight the working conditions that many migrant workers, and particularly our Portugese and Polish colleagues, endure working for agricultural gangmasters and in some food processing plants."

The rally will also commemorate the bicentenary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

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