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### **1. Branch meetings.**

The branch committee continues to re-visit the guidance.

[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10879/Democratic-continuity-advice-for-branches-regionsdevolved-nations/pdf/ucu\\_covid19-democratic-continuity.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10879/Democratic-continuity-advice-for-branches-regionsdevolved-nations/pdf/ucu_covid19-democratic-continuity.pdf)

We are not considering scheduling any face-to-face branch meetings at present; the committee has met on-line since in November 2020.

**The next branch meeting is planned for 8<sup>th</sup> June 2021.** The on-line meetings are open to branch members; and the zoom link will be sent to you by email.

We will continue to keep in regular contact with you by email.

You can contact officers and reps by the emails listed in this newsletter; the general branch email address is [ucu.swest@gmail.com](mailto:ucu.swest@gmail.com) and members are welcome to contact us anytime.

Tony Staunton chair SWRMB

### **2. Welcome to all members new to this branch since the previous newsletter.**

Maggie Roberts from Nottingham.  
Alistair Clark from the University of the West of England.  
Mike Sheaff from Plymouth.

Only those wishing to appear in the list are included. If you have any suggestions for the newsletter we are happy to hear from you.

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**Newsletter:** A termly newsletter for retired UCU members is sent to all branch members for whom we have email addresses.

**Email addresses:** UCU encourages us to use our home email when we retire.

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For more information please contact:

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or contact the officers below:

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### 3. National Pensioners Convention

Some of you will already be individual members of the NPC.

<https://www.npcuk.org/join-us-and-get-involved>

In this branch we are affiliated with Western NPC and Devon and Cornwall branches.

The NPC website is <https://www.npcuk.org/>

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### Are you getting all the info?

If UCU HO has your email you should also receive regular updates on campaigns from UCU head office as well as occasional branch emails.

If this is not the case let us know and we can check with the H.O on your behalf.

### National Pensioners Convention work during lockdown.

The NPC's main objective is to promote the welfare and interests of all pensioners and to secure dignity, respect and financial security in retirement. The NPC is the largest campaigning organisation for pensioners in the UK playing a key role in defending the welfare state and public services. UCU SW RMB has delegates to the two branches of the NPC in our region. Devon and Cornwall (DA) and Gloucester, Avon and Somerset (GAS) Although branches have had to cancel meetings during the last lockdown the national office has been busy on our behalf.



On 1<sup>st</sup> February a campaign was launched to promote digital inclusion. Many older people cannot afford digital technology or need training in how to use it. The drive to digital-only access

to services and purchases by many UK organisations breaches the human rights of our oldest citizens who may live in digital-poverty increasingly excluded from essential services. The NPC is lobbying the Government to ensure that the problems faced by older people who do not have or do not want access to the internet are taken into consideration. They point out that lack of access may breach the Equality Act of 2010 and that older people have concerns over the issue of security when giving information online. Surveys show that fear of internet scams is a key reason for not going online in later life. The Government needs to invest to make broadband more accessible to older and vulnerable people and viable alternatives should be available for those who cannot or do not want to go online.

The NPC has added its voice to the call for a public inquiry into the Government handling of the pandemic. Government has been approached by NPC about number of deaths and concerns about Covid patients moved into care homes and delays in the second inoculation programme. Work and campaigning continues around the issue of a National Care service and creation of an Older People's Commissioner for England. The NPC continues to investigate ageism and the 'unconscious bias' that many believe impacted policy and decisions during the pandemic.

Other ongoing campaigns include fighting against the unabated privatisation of the NHS and fighting to preserve the state pension triple lock safeguard and the over 75's free TV licence.

Ruth Amias SW RMB NPC

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#### 4. Introducing Mike Sheaff our new branch vice chair



With a strong family background in education it perhaps wasn't surprising I saw teaching as a career. Both my parents were teachers and members of NUT (my Mum joined ATTI when mobbing to FE), as was my Dad's father who died tragically young from World War One war injuries. Studying for my undergraduate degree in Psychology at Plymouth Polytechnic, I gained my PGCE from Marjons in 1978. But in July 1977, supporting exploited workers at Grunwicks, I found myself randomly arrested. I was subsequently charged with assault on the police, threatening behaviour and even possession of an offensive weapon. Although cleared of the last charge, guilty decisions on the first two led to a prison sentence, ultimately suspended. With this obstacle to entering teaching, I took what I thought might be a relatively temporary job as a hospital porter. It

taught me a lot: about other people, relationships, and things that matter. Active in my union, the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE, now part of Unison) I took a leading local role in the 1982 NHS pay dispute, becoming Plymouth Branch Secretary of COHSE, with around 2,000 members. Others commented on my preparations for negotiations, and I decided to study for the MA in Industrial Relations at Warwick, from 1985 to 1986. I saw a trade union research role as a potential direction, but I enjoyed the return to study, and continued with a PhD, focused on trade unionism and employment relations in the NHS. For some time I held various roles, including trade union studies tutor with the WEA, and Associate Lecturer at Plymouth Polytechnic, before gaining a full-time lecturer post in Sociology at the University of Exeter in 1991. Here I joined the Association of University Teachers, although was not active due to other commitments. By now we had a young family, I had been elected as a Labour councillor on Plymouth City Council, and I was commuting from Plymouth to Exeter. My role at Exeter included close engagement with nurse education, related to Project 2000 bringing this into higher education. In 1995, for Cornwall, Devon & Somerset, this transferred to what was by now the University of Plymouth, where I was successful in obtaining a lecturing post. Here I remained, until retiring as Associate Professor in Sociology in December 2020. In addition to my teaching and research, I was active in NATFHE, being Branch Chair in the period around the 2006 pay dispute, when I also represented the then South West region on the NEC, including

for the first year of the newly created UCU.

I was twice elected as academic staff member on the Board of Governors, on the second occasion receiving around two-thirds of votes cast. In this role I found myself having to raise challenging questions about our Vice-Chancellor in what became a very difficult period for the University. So I was grateful when Plymouth's current VC acknowledged my commitment to good governance at my last meeting of the University Senate, in November 2020.

It is a commitment I have held in other roles, including elected city councillor (1991-2000) and NHS Non-Executive Director (2001-2011). The latter also led to a difficult time, when questions I raised during the Lansley reorganisation were rebuffed, leading me to pursue them through freedom of information requests. On one occasion, having taken an appeal against the Information Commissioner and Department of Health to the Information Tribunal, the judge described my "entirely legitimate quest for transparency and accountability". I have learned this can sometimes be resented and obstructed, but I have been able to develop use of FOIA in my own research, something I am continuing in retirement.

For several years my recreation has been allotment gardening, an activity needing protection, and I am Chair of our Allotment Association, based on Plymouth's largest allotment site with over 200 plots.

Mike Sheaff SWRMB

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## **5. News from Petroc UCU Members vote to accept pay deal 17.4.21**

Members at Petroc College have voted overwhelmingly to accept a deal on pay and conditions which will see all staff

receive a backdated 2.1% pay increase as well as some improvements to job security and leave entitlement. UCU's Catriona Scott said: 'While a 2.1% pay increase clearly doesn't go any significant way towards addressing the real terms pay cuts FE staff have experienced over many years, we are pleased that Petroc has engaged with us on these matters and that the college has used additional funding they received this year to improve staff pay. UCU obviously wants to see other colleges similarly prioritising their staff when making decisions on how to spend any additional funding.'

Catriona Scott SW Exeter

## 6. A year as the branch Chair.

Through my first year as Chair I have been impressed and inspired by the energy and impact of the activists in our Branch, and particularly enjoyed working alongside Mike Farmer for the first time. Our branch regularly promotes the rights and issues affecting older people and retired workers into the local trade union movement, as well as constantly publicising the pay and conditions issues of our members in FE and HE. We continue to offer practical support and help to local colleges who are campaigning to protect their members. The year of COVID Pandemic has placed enormous pressures on students and lecturers, with the union joining with other teaching unions to demand safety for all. Close relationships between UCU and student organisations have also put pressure on college authorities to place safety to the fore, although the access to resources and issues of accommodation and course costs continue to demand fair reparations.

The Pandemic has exposed the deep inequalities in our society, and I have helped build the People Before Profit Campaign to build solidarity for nurses pay and keeping the £20 uplift to recipients of Universal Credit, due to be ended in June despite the huge rise of numbers of in-work claimants and evictions of claimants by private landlords: <http://peoplebefore-profit.com>

Our primary influence appears to be through the local Trades Union Councils across the South West. Our Branch representatives can inform the trade union movement of the significant campaigns in the UCU, promoting and building solidarity with our branches in dispute.

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/trades-councils-who-we-are-and-what-we-do>

**Environmental and climate concerns** are shared by many of us, promoting campaign events and demands for probably the single most important issue of our time. As the Branch's trained and accredited Green Rep I have attended two UCU national conferences. I sit on the national steering group of the Campaign against Climate Change

<http://www.campaigncc.org> routinely translating climate priorities into trade union policy and practice. The UCU is at the forefront of trade union campaigning to prevent climate catastrophe by reducing global heating emissions.

Current Government resourcing is extremely poor, for example, funding being currently at less than 10% of Germany's despite Prime Minister Johnson hosting the COP26 Climate Conference in November on behalf of the UK. I attend meetings of the COP26

Coalition ( <https://cop26coalition.org> ) campaigns group, hoping to mobilise locally for a set of protests and climate teach-ins during the conference week. I hope to be able to continue to support the campaigning work of UCU and trade unionism in the coming year, facilitating the life and activities of our SWRM Branch and engaging with progressive politics for global justice, equality and a sustainable future.

Tony Staunton SW RMB

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## 7. Book Corner.

The Secret Barrister. Anon, 2018. Macmillan.

Another contribution from my book group. I made more notes about this book than any other we have read because firstly most of it was new to me and, secondly it was a worrying indictment of our justice system.

Here are some points it covered:

Anglo American adversarial versus continental Napoleonic inquisitorial systems.

Barristers' expertise and the official criteria for magistrates (voluntary work in the community rates highly).

Those Defendants who are sliding on and off the bottom rung of social functioning while desperately scrapping for daily survival.

The language interpretation services which were privatised with disastrous knock-on effects where 60% of those formerly supplying services to the courts resigned over the new pay & conditions offered under privatisation.

The Criminal Procedural Rules which sound good but...

The so-called Innocence Tax, where Legal Aid cuts to save money had unintended consequences.

A comparison with the with our view of the courts NHS.

That the truth is not the guiding light.

The "infallibility" of science, particularly 'experts' in the witness box.

The issue of those wrongly imprisoned, and their lack of compensation when released, because they are unlikely to meet the requirements: The "Good luck with piecing up your life" is the most they are likely to get.

This made me particularly angry with Chris Grayling who decided that we need a generous scheme for passengers whose trains were delayed by 15 minutes, making sure they receive due compensation for inconvenience events outside their control. There is a disconnect between criminal law and justice we have a nominal legal system.

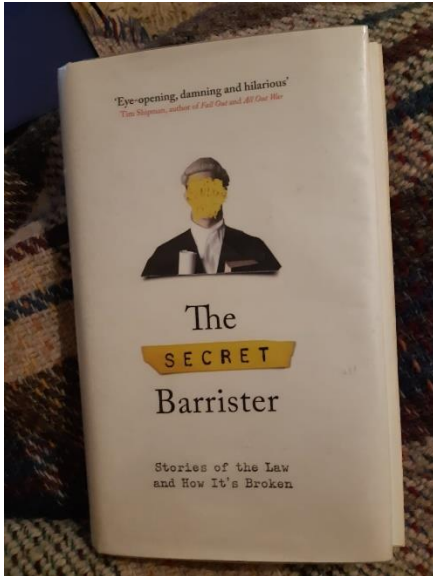
For most of us the likelihood of being accused of something is low but if we are accused of a crime we want a good barrister to defend us; if we are a victim, a good barrister to prosecute it. Not to mention a good judge; since judges are picked from the available pool of barristers and solicitors, and that pool is becoming impoverished pool.

This is uneasy reading if, like me, you've never given much thought to the criminal justice system. Here's what one of our Book Group said:

*"My job in the Magistrates Court (6yrs) was over 45 years ago. It's disappointing to learn that the training and selection for Magistrates has not improved a lot. It's tragic that financial cuts continue to cause suffering for victims.*

*My husband retired from the police service in 2010 but subsequently the cuts were even more severe, with 20,000 officers lost. His last role in the control room at HQ became increasingly stressful with no officers available to send to urgent incidents (especially at weekends) whilst more calls were arriving all the time. There was money invested prior to 2010 with a new HQ at Portishead, IT systems,*

*training, uniform etc. But, since then, investment has been lacking and the promise of 20,000 new police officers would only replace the numbers taken away!*



*Book cover from Mara. Bristol.*

Wondering what to do about it.... The Good Law Project is doing something. A not-for-profit campaign organisation that uses the law to protect the interests of the public. <https://goodlawproject.org/> Likewise, the Bristol Law Centre, Specialist free legal advice in Bristol and beyond, for people who could not otherwise access justice.

<https://www.bristolawcentre.org.uk/>

Jo Corke SW RMB

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## **8. UCU Environment Conference 17th March 2021.**

Janet Farrar, UCU President Elect, offered a welcome speech, comparing UCU Climate work with other trade unions. We have integrated climate issues into training and development courses for members, and in September 2019 we took the motion to the Trades Union Congress to support the youth & student Strikes for Climate. Most decisions made

by Universities to disinvest from fossil fuel industries and green campuses have been in response from demands from the UCU as a negotiating union. We have lobbied the Chancellor of the Exchequer for training in Green Jobs and contributed via the TUC for the government's Green Jobs Task Force. We are lobbying for the USS pension scheme to divest from fossil fuel companies. Lobbying is not enough. We need to develop the level of membership activism and participation. We need to help students build sustainable institutions to take the climate work forward from year-to-year. Students after a year of the COVID Pandemic have become disillusioned, and the campaigning has to be rebuilt this year. The UCU want to make climate change a basic part of routine negotiation with universities and colleges, as a fundamental part of a trade union's activities.

Marianne Quick spoke to the strategies for workplace claims for sustainability, working alongside students to a joint claim to drive through low-emissions policies and practice in all colleges. We call for Colleges to declare a Climate Emergency; time limited plans for emission reductions and greening the campuses (see carbon targets: <https://www.carbontargets.uk/>); ensuring global climate justice is embedded across all teaching curricula; disinvestment from fossil-fuel companies; •recognition of trained Green Reps as core members of Branch Officer and negotiating teams, with protected time for union duties; Progress with FE colleges on training to bridge the low-carbon trades gap, with Green Apprenticeship Bursaries for people from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Meg Baker, Director of SOS-UK (Students Organising for Sustainability UK-previously NUS Sustainability Team) seeking to embed sustainability in formal education from early years to adult learning, across all elements of society. The charity has produced data since 2014 showing that 91% of UK students are concerned about climate change and the environment. We need to ensure that education equips students as “agents for change” and counter the climate anxiety that can be disabling. SOS-UK carries out educational surveys identifying positive attitudes to sustainable development and global climate justice. SOSUK hosts the “Teach the Future” campaign calling for a UK Emergency Education Act. 70% of school-teachers state they have not had adequate training to educate children on climate change -teacher training courses need to embed the knowledge, skills and competencies to support students to address the Climate Emergency. The campaign includes recognition of the need to decolonise education to decarbonise education, to reframe and reconstruct the curriculum away from Europe-centred colonial lens. [www.sos-uk.org](http://www.sos-uk.org)In plenary discussion, Green Reps offered reports from Branch activities: Graham Petersen from Greener Jobs Alliance identified a number of effective UCU campaigns in liaison with Trades Union Councils, presenting formal programmes to local municipal councils to influence Council policy towards green education and skills training. He identified Wandsworth Council in London as a successful example of the establishment of a Green Liaison Committee.

Melanie Keespoke of the resources offered through the “Invest for Change”

Campaign <https://www.investforchange.uk/> which challenges university and college investments amounting to £15billion, calling for transfer into sustainability projects and engaging with companies through Corporate AGMs to influence company practices. An example is the successful pressure from HSBC shareholders to disinvest from coal. Emily Heath from Lancaster University UCU and Scientists for Global Responsibility. The USS pension fund has 400,000 members with assets of £80billion including a 10% stake in Heathrow Airport and more than £1billion invested in fossil fuel companies. There is no option for members to assert ethical investment. USS has agreed to disinvest from thermal coal and certain weapons systems. In break-out groups Green Reps were encouraged to consider their own potential for furthering the UCU Climate Strategy as discussed.

The Wales TUC Greener Workplaces toolkit was discussed as a great resource for all green reps <https://www.tuc.org.uk/greener-workplaces-just-transition-wales-tuc-toolkit-trade-unionists>

A key principle is that universities must 1) follow the science, 2) declare their current emissions across the whole “value chain” including the outsourced emissions 3) set out a pathway for reaching absolute zero within a just share of the global carbon budget.

In the afternoon we focussed upon the COP26 Coalition <https://cop26coalition.org/> and G7 Coalition <https://resistg7.org/resources/> initiatives. UCU has been busy with the Mock Cop initiative <https://www.mockcop.org/phase-2/> and is continuing to build for actions. Students are trying to get a space for MockCOP within the blue or green zones



at COP. Several applications have already been made and we're waiting to hear back. We're working with delegates from Mock COP to support them and staff to lobby governments to implement all or part of the Mock COP treaty too. Sam Mason, who represents UCU on the COP26 Coalition Committee, explained the COP26 Coalition of UK Civil Society, begun in 2019 before the COP was postponed for a year due to the Pandemic. As part of the Coalition, which includes hundreds of organisations, UCU is focussing upon global justice as a principle. There are 8 working groups including comms, culture, logistics, mobilisations, political strategy; alongside caucuses including the trade union caucus. The question was asked: Do we need a strategy for resisting "greenwash" at COP? COP 26 "Principal Partners" include: Scottish Power, which is notorious for market rigging and aggressive billing; National Grid, which exemplifies the centralised power structure opposed to the distributed energy system that is key to a post-carbon society; NatWest, which is the new name for Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS). RBS is re-inventing itself, having been utterly discredited for its reckless banking practices which contributed to the 2007-8 global financial crisis, also for its fraudulent conduct pushing Small and Medium Sized Enterprises into bankruptcy. And of course, RBS was known as "The Oil and Gas Bank", with aggressive investments in extreme fossil fuels. There is a model motion for all Branches, with the request for branches to sign-up to the COP26 Coalition: Sign-up: [cop26-tradeunions-request@lists.riseup.net](mailto:cop26-tradeunions-request@lists.riseup.net)

A conference on 22nd April will be held via "From the Ground Up" to develop the discussions about how to approach

COP26. There are regional coalition meetings as well that UCU branches can link in to.

[https://padlet.com/megbaker1/xjxnndk0xchmcu\\_t6](https://padlet.com/megbaker1/xjxnndk0xchmcu_t6) For a model motion on supporting the COP26 Coalition, see this page, [https://www.cacctu.org.uk/COP26\\_2020\\_onwards](https://www.cacctu.org.uk/COP26_2020_onwards)

Peter Wood spoke to climate policy preparation for UCU Congress 2021. He explained how Conference works and how Branches can raise a motion. There are 9 draft options to Congress relating to Climate. As deadlines were scheduled for two days time the explanations were for future reference. Motions are published on 29th March [www.ucu.org.uk/Congress2021](http://www.ucu.org.uk/Congress2021) and amendments are able to be offered up to 7th May 2021. There is a motion on "Radicalising Education for Sustainable Development" which focusses upon employability in a Green economy. The UCU Education Committee is also pushing an enabling motion for investment in retraining and upskilling for green jobs. A key motion is for the establishment of a Climate Action Network with a formal role in the UCU structures, including an annual Conference on environmental issues. Being a UCU Conference we were bound to incorporate some more philosophical as well as academic debate, including: "... "sustainability" is a tainted concept -too tied in with the Brundtland conception of Sustainable Development which is both anthropocentric and based on growth economics and extractivism -whether that is capitalist or socialist ('neo') extractivism". I also believe Environment is too passive and too easily bent away from the key issues. For me then 'Climate' and 'Ecological' are the key words. However, failing agreement...revert back to 'Green' -at least everyone gets what it means." sorry I meant to send this one from Christine Kwauk

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/roadblocks-to-quality-education-in-a-time-of-climate-change/>

The final Conference session was to consider building local networks and alliances, alongside engaging with local authorities to develop local environmental planning:

[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11259/Engaging-with-regional-and-local-authorities-on-climate-change/pdf/ucu\\_climatechange-localauthorities.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11259/Engaging-with-regional-and-local-authorities-on-climate-change/pdf/ucu_climatechange-localauthorities.pdf)

was recognised that funding and devolution requires regional and sub-regional responses. Trades Union Council were seen as central to networking.

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/green-new-deal>

Following this Conference I moved on in the evening to a meeting of the COP26 Coalition. A long and very valuable day.

Tony Staunton, UCU SWRMB Green Rep

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## 9. Access to Work – disability matters.

Although this is for those still working, retired members may find it of interest to pass on.

If you currently have hearing aids from the NHS but still struggle with certain aspects of your working life, you can apply for help and support based on your needs. This may include a grant to help cover the costs of practical support in the workplace including;

- adaptations to the equipment you use – e.g. loop system attachments
- special equipment or software – streamers and assistive devices, special phones or headphones
- British Sign Language interpreters and video relay service support, lip speakers or note takers
- disability awareness training for your colleagues

To get help from Access to Work you must:

- have a disability or health condition (physical or mental) that makes it hard for you to do parts of your job
- be 16 or over
- live in England, Scotland or Wales

You also need to have a paid job or be about to start or return to one. A paid job could include:

- self-employment
- an apprenticeship
- a work trial or work experience
- an internship

For more information and to apply for Access to Work contact them directly via <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Telephone: 0800 121 7479

Textphone: 0800 121 7579

NGT text relay (if you cannot hear or speak on the phone): 18001 then 0800 121 7479, Monday to Friday, 8am to 7.30pm

Liza Sentance Trades Council.

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## 10. What's happening at Regional Office?

Regional staff continue to work from home, and it is not anticipated that this will change in the near future; we will of course inform branches when this changes and when we are allowed safely to be back on the road.

Since March 2020 as you will expect much of the time of your regional staff has been taken supporting branches in the challenges of the pandemic. We do not intend to detail that work only to say that

most branches have required official to lead discussions and that through those discussions we have established safe practices pretty much in line with UCU guidance. It should be noted that only 2 branches, University of Bristol and this week Falmouth have needed to enter a disputes procedure in relation to employers' actions and proposals.

Setting aside Covid related work your officials have led and are leading on **collective issues** the substantial ones are set out below:

- Threats to jobs in 3 institutions
- Detrimental threats to pay and conditions in HE (Covid connected) in 5 HEIs. All of these have been resisted through a combination of branch campaigns and official led negotiations
- Policy changes at 9 institutions mainly in FE
- 2 reorganisations (FE)
- A merger which demands a substantial time commitment from officials related to TUPE and harmonisation of pay and conditions
- Live anti-casualisation negotiations in 5 institutions
- A successful pay plus campaign in an FE college with demand from FEC that this process is now rolled out in all our GFE colleges
- Workload claims
- Risk assessments and negotiations across the 8 South West Prisons. The working environment for Prison Education presents specific risks in non Covid times but under Covid this has been a very difficult time. The biggest concern for members has been bringing Covid into Prisons and infecting very vulnerable prisoners who have been locked up for 23 hours a day. This

work has been exceptionally time consuming.

### **Branch Development Organiser (BDO).**

Including:

- Green field organising exercise which has recruited over 40 new members
- Will be supporting next round of Strike School
- Attending all CPD courses for networking and reps recruitment

### **Training Report**

Successful training programme at the start of the academic year.

Risk Assessment; Caseworkers; Rep 1; Rep 2 (currently running).

### **Casework report**

As always casework has been very busy and wide-ranging within the region. Morin has been supporting members and local officers with the following issues:

Redundancies, Appeals against dismissals, Variation of contracts, Disciplinary processes, Expiry of fixed term contracts, Disability discrimination, Concerns about Covid safety and returning to the work premises. Additionally, legal assessments have been sought from our agent solicitors in appropriate cases.

Keep safe Nick, Catriona, Dave, Philippa, Morin and Becca

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To SW branches from Philippa Davey:

I just wanted to let you all know that I will be leaving UCU on 21st May. It's not a decision I made lightly as it's the best job, team and Branches of anywhere I have worked. The ability to change people's lives for the better, to defend worker's rights and improve their terms and



conditions has been an absolute privilege. In fact, as I write this I wonder why I am actually leaving.....

But, I am off to join the Police

and take on some very different challenges. When I applied I didn't really believe I would get in, but when I received the formal offer I had to make a decision. If I don't give it a go now, it will be too late.

So, I am going to be one of the oldest degree apprentices and will be recruiting my lecturers to UCU!

I hope to speak to many of you personally before I leave, but if I don't have that privilege, I would like to thank you all for making the last 13 years such a fantastic journey. You all do the most amazing job, under extremely trying conditions because you want to make things better and I will miss you all. In solidarity

Phil Davey SW Region

## 11. TUC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE 3rd – 5th March 2021

### **Our future our fight**

An introduction by Francis O'Grady TUC general secretary to 1500 participants.

There were a dozen online sessions including interactive workshops and discussion panels to select from and 23 motions to conference over half of which were the impact of Covid19 on working women. A TUC survey had 50,000 responses in four days.

I heard contributions from Unison, NEU, College of Podiatrists, USDAW, ASLEF, The Royal College of Midwives, UCU (LSE), NASUWT, PCS, CSP, Artists Union, Unite the Union.

These speakers shared their own experiences and case work observations: workers are mainly women on low & insecure pay and 25% are on zero-hour contracts.

Low paid women often do not get sick pay.

Discrimination against women is exacerbated by the Covid pandemic.

Primary school support staff with no furlough arrangements.

An ambulance care worker now at £10.94 an hour said her conditions were worse than her time when she was in the military in Afghanistan.

Working from home has been encouraged by the government but it is not a choice for all and home is not necessarily a safe place for some women.

A survey of a national supermarket's employees - 88% responded that they have suffered abuse from customers.

Train drivers are working; requests for furloughs have often been rejected and their statutory rest between shifts is often 'not possible'.

Midwives who are almost exclusively women dealing with other women, reported that expectant and new mothers have suffered more discrimination by employers.

The presentation *Mary Macarthur and the women chainmakers*, was a highlight for me.

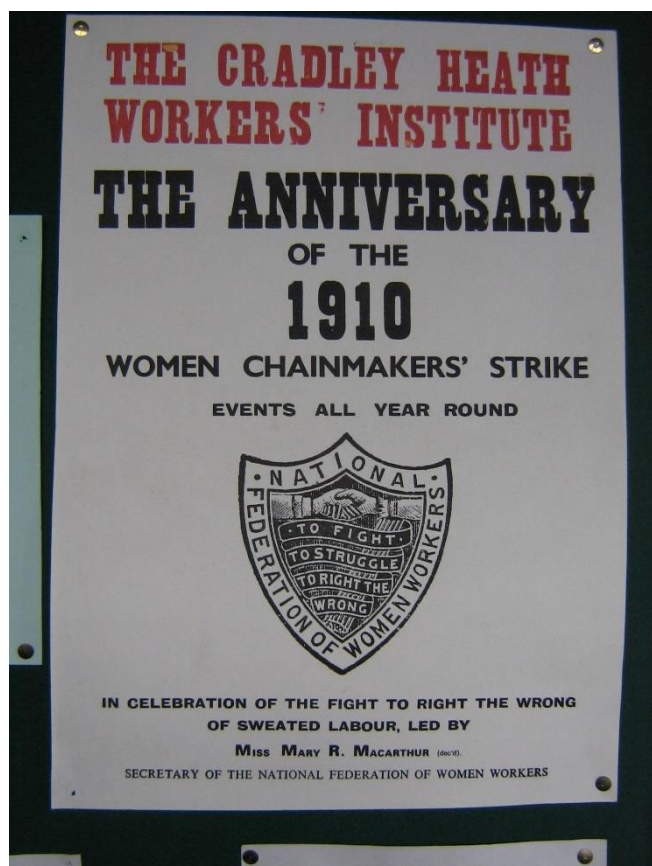
In 1910, the Women Chainmakers of Cradley Heath in the Black Country held a 10-week strike against working pay & conditions. The strike won public support and is credited with changing the lives of thousands of workers earning poor wages.

We saw a 1976 TV film featuring women who were part of the strike.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00wxd6q>

They said they worked from the age of 11, with no wages to begin with as they were “just learning the work”. They worked Monday to Friday from 7 to 7 and until 4 o’clock on Saturday. When they were proficient at forging links and welding them into chains they were required to produce 5000 links a week for 2/6 a week.

In 1910, the newly established Chain Trade Board announced a minimum wage for hand-hammered chain-workers of two and a half pence an hour - for many women this was nearly double the existing rate. At the end of the Trade Board's consultation period in 1910, many employers refused to pay the increase and they asked the women, who were mostly illiterate, to sign to continue working for 6 months at the old rate.



CC. The Institute was built with the money left over.

Mary Macarthur took charge; she provided, from public support, four shillings a week strike pay for 13 weeks. When they went back they got 14 shillings a week. “Don’t think of the Empire on which the Sun never sets; think of the wage that never rises.”

The TUC library exhibition is <https://www.tuc.org.uk/MaryMacarthur> TUC Women’s chainmakers festival this year will be online.

<https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/events/women-chainmakers-festival-virtual-in-2021/>

Jo Corke SW RMB

## 12. From the Archives.

### International Women’s Day 2021: Celebrating women’s achievements and campaigns for equality.

International Women’s Day (IWD) went from national to international following the second International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen in 1910. Rallies in several countries called for women’s rights to work, vote, be trained and hold public office. They also called an end to discrimination and for rights at work. This need was tragically illustrated a few days later when a fire in New York City took the lives of 140 working women. IWD continues to celebrate women’s achievements, raise funds for campaigns, raise awareness and lobby for change.

I am writing this to celebrate the women in the **Co-operative Women’s Guild (CWG)** and to identify what their campaigning can teach us for the change we need now.

The CWG, sprung from the Co-operative movement, was founded in 1883 to represent working women and spread co-operation in their communities. This was working women leading their own

campaigns, in contrast to other parts of the then women's movement in which they often had no voice.

The CWG campaigned for women's suffrage, for maternity rights and pay, but also for things which weren't explicitly discussed in other parts of the women's movement at the time, such as safe contraception and sexual health, divorce, protection from domestic violence and more. They made significant progress in all of these, with their large membership and impressive lobbying skills.

In 1913, following mass campaigning by CWG members, a National Insurance Bill was going through Parliament which included a provision for a maternity payment (remember all MPs were men at this stage). The campaigners had mobilised health visitors, nurses and doctors across the country to make their case to their MP. When the Bill reached committee stage they went to Parliament to watch the proceedings.

The MPs who strongly opposed this payment said that money paid direct to women was an insult to working men. The campaigners concluded that it was important for women not only to be present to watch the Bills in which they were interested but to be in the committee process itself. In short, they needed to get elected.

Women from the Co-operative movement subsequently became Labour MPs but they could not focus solely on the needs and experiences of working women. They had to take on wider considerations. This shift from activism outside Parliament to being an MP – and how this changes focus – is on my mind a lot.

Thangham Debonnaire MP  
With permission.

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### 13. Teachers' Pensions | For Members

**My Pension Online** is the Teachers' Pension online portal designed to help you manage your pension more efficiently.

<https://www.teacherspensions.co.uk/members/faq/my-pension-online/my-pension-online.aspx>

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### 14. Editor's Note.

Contributions to the newsletter are welcome.

Jo Corke SW RMB

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### And for MayDay.

Photo CC



END

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