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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.

All branch members 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

### 1. Branch meetings.

#### A branch meeting is planned for Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

It is yet to be decided if this will be a zoom meeting. Papers will be distributed to members in time for the meeting.

We will continue with the minimum requirements in the guidelines by keeping in regular contact with our members by email.

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

**Richard Eke** joined us from UWE. Richard said *"I was delighted to learn that City of Bristol College have finally achieved the outcome from inspection they so richly deserve. I am currently volunteering with Bristol and South Gloucestershire MS Group and for my personal benefit attending NeuroKinex facility in Bradley Stoke, for physiotherapy sessions. I*

*suspect that I shall soon be volunteering for them, perhaps walking an extra mile to raise a few quid for them. With very best wishes to you and any other retired members who may remember me, Richard."*

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

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**Newsletters:** these newsletters are 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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### 3. National Pensioners Convention

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



NPC-GAS members will be aware of the dreadful state of buses in large parts of our region, with some communities being left with no bus service at all. Communities and individuals across the region are campaigning for buses to be taken under public control, which would enable the West of England Combined

Authority (WECA) to determine routes, timetables and fares.

The campaign, 'Reclaim Our Buses', has launched a petition asking the WECA mayor, Dan Norris, to investigate this. Within a few days of its launch the petition had gained over 1400 signatures; it is now over 2000, but lots more are needed! Please consider signing the petition and sharing it with friends and relevant groups.

**The petition calling for the franchising of regional bus services, is here. [Link to petition](#)**

There's a report of the launch here: [Link to report.](#)

Keith Evans  
Secretary NPC GAS

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#### 4. News from around the SW region.

##### Gloucester Trades Council Report May 2023



Copyright GTC

Gloucester Trades Council has continued to meet on zoom but held a public hybrid meeting in April to discuss the future of the NHS. The labour party parliamentary candidates for Gloucester and Stroud were invited to speak, accepted and then

faced a challenging reception from those opposed to further privatisation and under funding of the service.

Delegates to the Trades Council have continued to support workers in national and local disputes including GE Dowty Propellers, Gloucester University, local hospitals and Mullers in Stonehouse.

The Stroud annual May Day march was held on workers' Memorial Day 28th April. The trades council had a stall and speakers from local unions outside the Ecotricity HQ at Wallbridge, Stroud.

A collection was made at the gathering for the workers in dispute with GE Dowty Propellers and money for the strike fund handed over to the Unite Convenor.

Delegates to Gloucester Trades Council have attended the monthly meeting of the group proposing to set up a Trades Council in Stroud. Stroud Trades Council stopped meeting 20 years ago due to lack of delegates and a group of Stroud Trade Unionists have successfully organised to revive the Council. Numbers of potential delegates are growing and the group has the go ahead from Dave Chapple to hold an inaugural meeting in September to elect officers. Concern is still being expressed by members of the Gloucester (and district) Trades Council that the formation of another Council in the county will weaken their membership base and spread activists too thinly around the county.

The need for the 3 TCs Stroud / Cheltenham and Gloucester to communicate and combine forces when appropriate has been stressed. The possibility of a county association along the lines of the one in Somerset is under

discussion. The 'new' Stroud Trades Council planned a stall in Stroud in June with TUC and Trades Council recruitment material. Members of the Red Band will be playing to grab the attention of Saturday shoppers.

It was disappointing that the Midsummer Fiesta, Montpellier, Cheltenham, on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> July was cancelled by the organisers due to the threat high winds and thunder storms. It has been confirmed that the 2023 event will not be re-arranged.

[Ruth Amias. TC Glos.](#)

Plymouth Trade Union Council. 6.6.23.

Strikes and Solidarity remain the cornerstone of our work. As I have reported here as Chair, the Plymouth Trades Union Council (PTUC) has donated it's entire budget of £800 to the UCU Branch at Plymouth University, in response to a plea for welfare help. I hope our Branch can also donate.

In other work, the PTUC supports the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the Stop the War Coalition (StW), sponsoring meetings and public events in the City. It was most gratifying to see the UCU Congress correspond with the PTUC policy by passing the resolution on Ukraine, condemning Putin and also criticising NATO escalation, calling for a ceasefire. There can be nothing more immediately dangerous than the pledge by President Biden to supply MI16 fighter planes – an escalation that can only extend and expand the conflict.

On these matters I was guest speaker at a Plymouth CND public meeting on "Climate not Nuclear" at the end of May, the research for identified the real threat of

use of nuclear weapons in the Ukraine conflict under the mistaken military strategy of "theatre nuclear warfare". The extent of nuclear weapons, and drive from non-nuclear countries to develop them also ensures a significant new arms race, with trillions of dollars being spent on weapons of mass destruction which should be being used to mitigate the worst of the climate emergency.

Plymouth hosted an excellent play, "In Other Words", touring across Devon & Cornwall to commemorate the CND-led women's Peace protest linking arms across the Tamar Bridge on 24th May 1983. This was the time of Greenham Common peace camp, successful in forcing US nuclear weapons back out of UK soil. Last month I supported the latest CND protest at the US base at Lakenheath, Suffolk, where once again, US nuclear weapons are to be installed. I hope our Branch will extend support to CND in the coming months and years.

With the RMT, ASLEF and Junior Doctors back out on strike in June, our activists will be busy once again supporting the picket lines and building strike fund collections in workplaces and in the city centre.

[Tony Staunton TC Plymouth](#)

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## 5. Toothless

**Taunton and West Somerset Trades Council (Monday, June 5) debated the lack of NHS dental care in Somerset, with Mark Jones from the campaign group Toothless In England, addressing the council meeting.**

Delegates heard about the group's origins and campaigning activities. Toothless in England's simple goal is that everyone should be able to access an NHS dentist.

Mark Jones told the meeting that MPs' mailboxes were "overflowing" with complaints about the lack of NHS dental services. Registration with a dental practice – the process that meant that you were on a patient list – ceased in 2006 when the then Labour Government introduced a new contract for NHS Dental Services. The meeting heard that "Two years later, in 2008, the Health Select Committee described that contract as "unfit for purpose". Very little has been done to improve matters since then.

Taunton and West Somerset Trades Council agreed to launch a "Toothless in Somerset" campaign group. Liz Payne, Secretary of Taunton and West Somerset Trades Council, said "Lack of access to NHS dental services has become a critical issue for a huge number of people across the country and Taunton is tragically no exception. Refusal of access to NHS oral care is particularly affecting the poorest and most vulnerable in our community, including children, and can mean that people suffer absolutely unnecessary pain and trauma. Serious health issues remain undetected, in some cases with life-threatening consequences. What Mark told us about the 'Toothless' campaign was really inspirational and it is great that our Trades Council decided this evening to launch 'Toothless in Taunton'"

Mark Jones said "Workers from communities in and around Taunton are painfully aware of the dangers faced by their inability to access NHS dental care. If you're at work suffering from severe toothache, your mind is distracted and focus on doing the job safely is at risk of being lost. That's not good for the worker, work colleagues or the employer. Toothless In England recognises this and

it's one of the reasons why we're demanding an NHS dentist for everyone."

Charles Henderson will be part of a Taunton TC delegation to meet with local MP Rebecca Pow on 8 September when this will be one of four main items. After that, the TC will consider further action which may include a public meeting to which the public, local dentists and the prospective parliamentary candidates will be invited.

You can read more about the campaign and their submission to the Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into NHS dentistry here:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/written-evidence/117204/pdf/>

Charles Henderson  
Taunton and West Somerset Trades Council.

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## 6. Falmouth University 23 June 2023

We welcome Falmouth University's decision to bring on-campus academic staff in-house from Tuesday 1 August 2023.

The move means staff will automatically be enrolled onto the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS), which has employer contributions of 23.6%.

All new campus-based academic jobs will also be employed directly through the university, rather than a subsidiary company. The decision brings a long-running dispute to an end with Falmouth UCU members overwhelmingly voting to resolve the dispute and work constructively with management going forward.

Falmouth University UCU branch co-chair David Devanny said: 'We have been campaigning for this for some time, and this is clearly an issue which means a lot to UCU members here at Falmouth, who have sacrificed a lot. This outcome allows on-campus members to be employed by the university again, giving them the same terms, conditions and pension rights as colleagues at other universities. It goes to show what productive collaboration between university leadership and trade unions can achieve.'

UCU general secretary Jo Grady said: *'Today I want to send a big congratulations to each and every member at Falmouth University for getting a deal for all on-campus academic-contracted staff to be brought back in-house. Other employers need to look to what Falmouth's management has achieved and work with UCU to make sure staff can access the sector's leading pension schemes.'*

UCU Head Office

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## **7. Book Corner. If Racism Vanished for a Day.**

The book arose from the RESPECT project whose aim was to begin to understand the experiences and impacts of racism on 10 – 11 year olds, and provide recommendations on how schools might better support children and teachers.

An interdisciplinary team from the University of the West of England, Bristol with expertise in race, education and psychology, together with a socially-engaged artist worked with children in three inner city schools in Bristol to

understand more about the impact of racism on children.

The project offered children the chance to reflect on their own lived experiences, and allowed the research team some insight into their perceptions and meaning making. Creative processes can enable people to express themselves in emotionally accurate ways and allows some insight into the nuances and complexities of the young people's feelings and their situations.

**What they found.** The research has highlighted that young children are deeply affected by institutional racism as depicted by the media through coverage of national and international incidents, as well as through their personal experiences or that of their friends and family. Children reported feeling a host of emotions including being scared, frightened, shamed, powerless and frustrated. Many young people were angry at what they had seen and heard, felt unsafe and sad.

You can read more about the RESPECT project here:

<https://respectprojectbristol.org/>

You can read the book [here](#)

The book includes a series of questions to ensure that readers can become fully engaged with what the children are saying. When I read it I reflected that some of the students in the place I used to work – UWE - will have been children with experiences like these. A sobering thought.

Jo Corke SW RMB

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## 8. Fighting for Bristol's Windrush generation.

An article, published 14.7.23, here by courtesy of Thangam Debbonaire, MP Bristol West and Shadow Leader of the House of Commons.

75 years ago, the first people from the Windrush generation arrived in the UK. Last month, I recognised the huge contribution they made to cities like Bristol. Shockingly, through a mix of the Home Office's cruel 'hostile environment' and sheer Tory incompetence, many people were prevented from accessing healthcare, work and housing. Worse still, some were wrongly detained, denied legal rights, and threatened with deportation. I've been fighting the Home Office for years for the people in Bristol West who've been caught up in this scandal.

Labour has raised concerns that the government has failed to process more than 2,000 compensation claims for people who were affected. More than a third have been waiting more than six months for a decision.

[In a speech to the House of Commons](#) (10:55:45), I raised the cost and complexity of the application process and the lack of access to affordable legal advice. I called on the government to clear that backlog and give the people who were treated so poorly the compensation they're owed.

Thangam Debbonaire MP  
14.7.23 newsletter.

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## 9. USS on course for restored benefits and lower contributions.

**19 July 2023.** Today, a consultation launched by the USS Trustee shows that the scheme is on track for full restoration of pension benefits by April 2024, which follows cuts that were imposed on staff in April 2022.

Figures included in the consultation demonstrate that not only can pensions cuts - which saw members lose on average 35% from their guaranteed retirement income - be restored, but that the contributions members are required to pay into the scheme can be reduced.

**The turnaround is a vindication of UCU's position that the April 2022 cuts were flawed, unnecessary, deeply irresponsible,** and demonstrates that UCU members were right to fight and take strike action to protect and win back their pensions.

Universities UK have pledged to work with the UCU to ensure that restoration of the scheme and other positive changes are introduced such as developing an equitable method to restore the lost value of member pensions, between April 2022 and restoration is agreed and will now consult employers following the publication of today's USS Trustee document.

UCU general secretary Jo Grady said: *'This is yet another step towards the restoration of our members pensions. I have lost count of the times we were told it would never happen, we were often mocked by pensions "experts" who maintained that our campaign and actions were pointless. This is a lesson, not only to UCU members, but workers in general - if you are prepared to fight for something then there is always a chance.'*

'This is also good news for the university sector as a whole. If the employer, UCEA can now table a proper pay and conditions offer then we can bring much needed stability to our sector for the first time in nearly a decade. This is what's needed. **It is what students deserve and it is what staff deserve.'**

UCU Head Office

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## 10. Durham Miners Rally 2023.

This year the event was featured in the French paper Le Monde.

The total or partial reproduction of an article, without the prior written authorization of Le Monde, is strictly forbidden, but Sharing is allowed, so you can read it here:

[https://www.lemonde.fr/en/m-le-mag/article/2023/07/15/the-durham-miners-gala-a-highly-political-celebration-for-british-workers\\_6054454\\_117.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/m-le-mag/article/2023/07/15/the-durham-miners-gala-a-highly-political-celebration-for-british-workers_6054454_117.html)

Nor are there any recent images which are copyright free; this one is:



The banners and bands coming down Old Elvet Bridge 2008. Paul Simpson.org. This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/) license.

Just out of interest... I asked ChatGPT for an article which is in italics.

*“The Durham Miners Rally 2023, a historic event celebrating the rich heritage of coal mining communities, took place on August 12th. This annual gathering, held in Durham, England, serves as a poignant reminder of the industry's past and its enduring influence on the region. Attended by thousands, the rally resonated with a sense of unity and solidarity.*

*The rally featured a diverse array of activities and presentations, ranging from speeches by labor leaders to cultural performances highlighting the vibrant traditions of mining communities. Notable figures from various sectors joined the event, emphasizing the rally's significance beyond the mining community itself. Central to the occasion were discussions on the evolution of mining practices and their impact on the environment and workers' rights. These dialogues highlighted the need for sustainable approaches and fair treatment of workers in all industries.*

*The rally's atmosphere was both reflective and forward-looking, commemorating the past struggles while emphasizing the importance of continued activism. The rally's attendees, sporting banners and symbols representing their respective mining affiliations, demonstrated the ongoing camaraderie that defines these communities.*

*As the day came to a close, a moment of silence was observed to honour those who lost their lives in mining accidents and to acknowledge the resilience of the miners and their families. This sombre moment was followed by a renewed commitment to advocating for workers' rights and social justice.*

*In conclusion, the Durham Miners Rally 2023 was a poignant and vibrant event that blended commemoration with a call for progress. It reaffirmed the enduring*

*spirit of mining communities and underscored the need for equitable treatment of workers across industries. The rally's impact is expected to resonate long after the day itself, inspiring further conversations and actions surrounding labour rights and societal change.”*

The Rally was cancelled during Covid and resumed after a 3-yr absence in 2022. This caused ChatGPT a problem as the date of August 2023 is clearly an error; when asked Chat GPT said:

*“As of my last knowledge update in September 2021, I do not have information about events that occurred after that date, including the specific details of the Durham Miners Rally in 2023. Therefore, I cannot confirm the accuracy of the date I provided. For the most accurate and up-to-date information about the Durham Miners Rally in 2023, I recommend checking with reliable news sources or official event websites.”*

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*Caveat lector.* The text in italics has been generated by a computer so whatever it produces cannot be taken at face value as it is not ‘refereed’. While I rely on Copyright Free material for the branch newsletter, ChatGPT may not be so careful.

I read ‘What Happens when AI reads a book?’ by **Ethan Mollick**, Associate Professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, where he studies and teaches innovation and entrepreneurship, and also examines the effects of artificial intelligence on work and education.

<https://www.oneusefulthing.org/p/what-happens-when-ai-reads-a-book>

Mollick had some positive feedback on using a different Large Language Model

(Anthropic’s Claude) and found it useful for providing teaching material. “Teachers will find a lot of use in getting the AI to help them with making book-based assignments meaningful and useful. .... (AI) elevates a non-human presence as the mediator between us and our knowledge. It is a trade-off we will need to manage carefully.”

Jo Corke SW RMB

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## 11. Campaigning for outstanding bus services.

Report of National Conference held in York on Saturday 17th June 2023.

There were 73 conference participants at the venue and 50 attending on line.

The conference was sponsored by two national unions (BFAWU and UCU), union branches, trades union councils, National Pensioners Convention groups and transport campaigning groups.

Louise Haigh MP. The conference started with a video from Louise Haigh MP for Sheffield Heeley and Shadow Transport Minister. This was a welcome message about putting buses at the heart of a future Labour Government’s transport policy, taking back control of buses via franchising and public ownership and allowing municipal corporations to own and run bus services.

Ellie Harrison (Get Glasgow Moving) spoke about experiences of campaigning for better transport in Glasgow and gave examples of European cities, such as Munich, Vienna and Zurich, which have much better integrated public transport services. In Munich the transport system is planned on the basis of ‘one network, one timetable, one ticket’. In Zurich access to

public transport is enshrined in law as a basic human right.

Brad Taylor (Campaign for the Protection of Rural England), explained that rural areas cover 85% of the land area but have only 18% of the population. Lack of transport adds to rural deprivation. Privatised bus companies do not run bus services to rural areas because they are not profitable.

Jan Shortt (National Pensioners Convention). Jan Shortt is General Secretary of NPC. She talked about the health benefits of being able to travel. She expressed NPC support for transport workers in their industrial disputes, including support for keeping ticket offices open and guards on trains.

Matthew Topham (We Own It). We Own It is an organisation which campaigns against privatisation. Matthew spoke about what a disaster privatisation of buses has been, how it has not happened in other European countries and how franchising can be a step towards bringing buses back into public ownership. Under franchising schemes bus companies are still private companies, but elected authorities decide on routes, timetables, fares and employment conditions for the workforce. It is important to raise demands for better buses with mayoral candidates.

Workshops:

Campaigning. Participants were encouraged to come up with ideas and priorities for campaigning. Part of the discussion focussed on being clear about who controls bus services and who should be lobbied. It was argued that it is more important to focus on elected authorities than on private bus companies. There was support for a week of action and participants also identified events at which Better Buses groups could hold stalls.

There are Better Buses groups for North, South and West Yorkshire and some other parts of the UK.

Rural Services. Many rural areas have few or no bus services, forcing people to use cars and trapping people without access to private transport and leading to rural depopulation. Younger people particularly are leaving rural areas because of lack of transport, since this affects ability to access education and employment.

Accessibility and Equality. This area covered disability access, safety for people travelling after dark and how transport systems can be designed to meet people's needs.

Climate. One of the key themes of the day was the way that bus campaigners can link up with groups campaigning on climate change. Reducing carbon emissions from transport is vital for tackling global warming.

Mayoral Authorities. The election of mayors in some areas such as West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire, with responsibilities for transport has provided a focus for campaigning around public transport.

Plenary. Feedback was taken from workshops, both those held in-person and online. Some of the important points were:

Climate: there is a need for a major shift away from cars to public transport systems. We need integrated public transport.

Accessibility: there are issues of safety using public transport late at night. There is a case for bringing back conductors on buses.

Mayoral authorities: it was seen as important to identify campaign partners,

including local businesses, who will support better public transport.

Rural services: it is important to extend fare caps and build integrated transport systems.

Liz Lawrence York & Humberside RMB

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## 12. 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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## 13. Ukraine Independence Day 24th August.

*“A referendum on the Act of Declaration of Independence was held in Ukraine on 1 December 1991. An overwhelming majority of 92.3% of voters approved the declaration of independence made by the Verkhovna Rada on 24 August 1991.”*

Wikipedia.



Banksy Stamp; photo Copyright Jo Corke

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## 14. Editor's Note.

Contributions to the newsletter are welcome.

Jo Corke SW RMB

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