



In this newsletter

1. 2015 March branch meeting
2. USS dispute – Employers turn nasty
3. False assumptions of the USS
4. The politics of USS
5. State Pension Deferral
6. National Pensioners Convention (NPC):
Women's Working Party Event
7. Pilgrimage to Tolpiddle
8. What Future for the NHS?
9. UCU Retired Members Branch
10. Branch meeting in Loughborough
11. More information
12. Pensioners manifesto - NPC

Please inform us of change of address or email

We encourage retired members to use their **home** email for when you give up your work email address. We send out a quarterly newsletter by email but only an annual newsletter by post. Sending the newsletters by post is increasingly expensive and private to boot.

2. USS dispute – Employers turn nasty

The Employers have proposed massive cuts in USS for members still working. The proposed cuts are all based on false financial premises which are detailed in following articles. UCU met the employers on 24th October and stressed the strength of feeling among members about the detrimental USS pension proposals. The plans were the most radical restructure of the fund in its history, yet the employers could not answer important questions from UCU about its effects. On top of the attack on pensions there is a warning of more cuts to come after the election.

With a lack of response from Employers, UCU moved to a ballot for industrial action. USS members voted overwhelmingly for strike action with a huge 45% turnout. 78% of members said they backed strike action and 87% voted for an assessment boycott. The day of action strike was successful and has been followed by a boycott of marking and assessment from 6th November.

A mixed response from the employers to UCU's marking boycott has left four universities facing all-out strike action in response to 100% pay docking threats. Union members at the University of Surrey have voted for a one-week strike, an academic boycott and a vote of no confidence in vice-chancellor Christopher Snowden – the current president of UUK – if the institution's decision to deduct full pay is not rescinded.

UCU general secretary Sally Hunt has written to members affected by the USS dispute to update them on the latest talks held on 13 November. She reported that the current boycott is being strongly supported across the country 'and it is against that backdrop of strong union action in support of our negotiating strategy that the meeting finally saw

1. Branch meeting 2015 March 3rd

10.30 a.m. – 12.30 p.m.
(Speaker at 11.30 a.m.)

Please note the earlier time
due to the booking requirements

Speaker: Val Wood
Nottingham Women's History Group

“Celebrating the contribution of Women's Trade Union
Activism in Nottingham - a historical perspective”

The branch committee wishes all retired members a merry Christmas and a prosperous new year.

We apologise for the newsletter concentrating on USS. However, we suggest that TPS members should read it because TPS is also in the firing line – just wait.

some progress in three key areas'. These are:

- * The employers agreed not to press their proposals to a vote.
- * A series of formal and informal negotiating meetings have been agreed between now and the next joint negotiating committee meeting on 15 January 2015.
- * A tripartite agreement was reached that actuaries representing UCU, UUK and USS should meet to discuss the funding position.

Stop press

The UCU higher education committee (HEC) met on 19th November to discuss the USS pension dispute including the agreement to a programme of negotiations between now and 15 January 2015. HEC also considered the following statement on pay docking arising from last week's negotiations: "UCU and Universities UK (UUK) have confirmed, following discussions on Wednesday, an agreement to suspend the industrial action in relation to the USS pensions dispute from Thursday 20 November until after the joint negotiating committee (JNC) meeting scheduled for Thursday 15 January 2015. UCU and UUK have agreed to a series of negotiating meetings between now and the scheduled January JNC. It is hoped that this period can be used to close the differences between the negotiating positions, with a view to reaching agreement on reforms to the USS scheme."

UCU has submitted a paper for consideration by the Funding and Benefits Working Group of the USS JNC and the JNC as a whole. While UCU does not accept USS' approach to valuation and de-risking, UCU notes that significant other actors consider there is a case for change. UCU believes their proposal has the benefit of maintaining the character of USS as a defined benefit scheme which is affordable, sustainable and attractive. It also carries the key benefit of not changing the nature of the scheme beyond recognition so that when economic circumstances change, the damage is not irreparable.

For details of the proposals and data that backs them up see: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/pdf/UCUHE236.pdf>

Russ Bowman

3. False assumptions of the USS

Letter to the THES

Recently, the Employers Pension Forum published "Proposed Changes to USS – Myths, Misconceptions and Misunderstandings". The document contains misinformation and a mistake. We focus on the section "M7: The assumptions used to value the fund have been chosen to artificially create a large deficit".

Having reviewed the assumptions given in the 2013 annual report, we believe, as statisticians and financial mathematicians, that each assumption is inadequately justified and that cumulatively they are unreasonably pessimistic and incoherent. The predicted salary increases assume a buoyant economy while investment returns assume a recession.

For example, the average annual rate of return on assets achieved by the Universities Superannuation Scheme over the past 10 years was about 7% and over the past five years about 11%. It is therefore difficult to understand the EPF's assertion that "since 2011...the continuing global economic challenges...have had a detrimental impact on the value of

USS' assets".

Meanwhile, members' wages are assumed to grow by the retail price index plus 1% (taken to be 4.4%) plus incremental increases. Over the past 20 years the actual rate was about 2.7%, with similar growth over the past 10 years. Post-2008 rates show negative real-pay growth. The age-related assumption is wage growth (1% to 4%) by progress up the salary scale: anecdotally, this assumption leads to higher pay growth rates than the majority of academics have experienced over the past 10 or 20 years. As the fund's actual experience was used to give a mean retirement age of 62 years at the last valuation, it seems odd that salary assumptions do not also reflect actual experience.

The assumptions on mortality appear to be unchanged from the 2011 valuation, yet the EPF archly advances the statement that "members of the USS are living longer so the pension scheme has to pay pensions in retirement for longer than planned" as a reason for deterioration in the fund's position since 2011.

A reasonable change in any one of these assumptions would give a lower estimated deficit. The EPF states that although changing the assumptions in this instance could affect the size of the deficit, "it cannot change a deficit into a surplus". It takes little mathematical knowledge to recognise that this statement is wrong.

Letter to THES from

Saul Jacka, professor of statistics, University of Warwick, Peter Green FRS, professor emeritus of statistics, University of Bristol, Steven Haberman FIA, dean, Cass Business School, Jane Hutton, department of statistics, University of Warwick, John Aston, professor of statistics, University of Cambridge, Sir David Spiegelhalter FRS, Winton professor of the public understanding of risk, University of Cambridge, Charles Taylor, professor of statistics, University of Leeds, Simon Wood, professor of statistics, University of Bath, Qiwei Yao, professor of statistics, London School of Economics Michalis Zervos, professor of mathematics, London School of Economics.

THES 23rd October 2014

4. The politics of USS

Reasons given for an action are usually divisible into stated reasons and the real reasons. The stated reasons for the proposed USS changes are a mixture of regulatory and choice by the USS Board. The USS is implausibly deemed to be in deficit due to the eschatology of assuming all pre-92 HE institutions simultaneously collapse and a bizarre "de-risking" that envisages a wholesale move from profitable equities to a tanking bond market.

The real reasons are easier to understand. The burden of risk is to be shifted more onto the shoulders of the employees and less on the employers. There is a significant neo-liberal lobby that includes ideologues such as Michael Johnson and John Ralfe together with the powerful financial industry and the self-interest of some HE top managers that are pushing these changes.

Ideologues such as Michael Johnson of the Centre for Policy Studies see public sector [Defined Benefit \(DB\)](#) pensions as a mill stone weighing down British Commerce and Industry; the original sin goes back to the 1945-50 Labour Government that introduced the parasitic Welfare

State. The way to supersede DB schemes is to gradually introduce a Defined Contribution (DC) element. (*Michael Johnson "Don't let this crisis go to waste" CPS Sept 2009*). This is precisely the manoeuvre being attempted with the USS. This first step could be applied to all Public Sector pensions.

the eventual removal of a DB pension scheme opens the way to privatisation. Both the CBI ("*Getting a grip" CBI April 2010*) and KPMG ("*Delivering value for money through infrastructural change" KPMG May 2010*) have seen public sector DB schemes as a barrier to "market entry" and a threat to "market neutrality". Privatisation of the DB schemes and their transformation to DC pensions will give big profits to City institutions. With the pension liability having been dumped, the way is open for greater privatisation of the educational sector as a whole. The history of the privatisation of the building societies and public utilities is that the biggest winners are the existing top managers. Sadly some VCs and college Principals might like to tread that same route.

The worsening of the USS scheme and especially the proposed introduction of a DC element pose a threat to all public sector pensions. Already the jackal voice of Mr Ralfe has been heard worrying that the TPS scheme is too expensive. All of us have a vested interest in supporting our UCU colleagues directly affected by the proposed USS changes.

Julian Atkinson

5. State Pension Deferral

Men born before 6th April 1951 and women born before 6th April 1953 are still eligible for the old state pension. This means that these will be able to defer their pensions and get an uplift on their pensions of 10.4% for each year deferred. Alternately, this can be taken as a lump sum plus interest at about 2% above Bank of England rate. For those born after these dates, the deferral rate is only 5.8% and there is no lump sum option.

This situation is not as clear as it seems and **people would be wise to take expert financial advice with regard to their personal situation**. Claiming extra state pension will affect any benefits you receive, such as pension credit, house benefit and council tax reduction. This is because the extra amount you get counts as income. However, if you decide to take a lump sum, these benefits won't be affected. Other factors can mean that the pension is deferred but uplift diminished or not given. The situation is complicated by having dependents such as a spouse under pension age. Deferral would mean that you would not get any extra state pension or lump sum for that part of your state pension.

Furthermore, if you are deferring your state pension, you will not build up any lump sum or extra pension for the days you're receiving any of the following benefits:

- Income support, Pension credit
- Employment Support allowance
- Jobseeker's allowance
- Carer's allowance, Incapacity benefit
- Severe disablement allowance
- Widow's pension, Widowed mother's allowance
- Any type of state pension

Julian Atkinson

6. National Pensioners Convention (NPC): Women's Working Party Event

This event was held at Tony Benn House (UNITE building), in Bristol on 1st November 2014. Participants had travelled from around the country including Devon and Cornwall, Derbyshire and even Liverpool, as well as locally from the Bristol area, to attend. We were informed and challenged by a range of speakers on topics highly relevant and important to us all.

Sharon Graham, Unite the Union executive officer, spoke of the very serious issues surrounding **the gradual privatisation of the NHS**. UNITE has been carrying out a very detailed and thorough look at the current situation and what lies behind it as one of their recent projects concerning public sector organisations. As well as expressing very strong views on the situation, Sharon presented us with information from their "Preliminary Leverage Report: In Defence of the NHS", in which Royal College of Physicians research has been used to trace the origins of government strategy to alter the NHS back to the Thatcher Government plan of 1987.

MPs Oliver Letwin and John Redwood together with David Willets took up the plan and they have apparently been working on it ever since. Their intention is to introduce an American-style insurance system, much of which has now happened. The chair of NHS England is quoted as talking about "new user charges for the NHS unless the economy strengthens".

Further danger around this and other developments is TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) being negotiated by the EU. This could potentially 'lock in' privatisation of healthcare if this is included in the final agreement; large parts of NHS could potentially be taken over by American global health organisations. So what can be done? Sharon (and Unite) suggest we must do all we can, including signing of petitions, letters to MPs, putting pressure on those in powerful positions, taking action locally by getting involved in our own community and generally pressing for the **Repeal of the Health Care Act** which has been pledged by the Labour Party. She was a most dynamic and convincing speaker so it was very encouraging to hear that Unite are up for the fight and going about it in a very thorough and structured way.

John Drake from Unison gave a thoughtful talk about the "**Ethical Care Campaign**". He discussed issues of the Government's ideological commitment to cutting public health care, backed up again by research into this. He talked about the reality of care workers jobs: zero hours, not being paid the minimum wage, not having travel time included or allowed for, lack of sick pay and private companies of course putting profit first.

Unison has put forward an **Ethical Care Campaign Charter** including such points as: appropriate time to be spent with clients/people, adequate travel time to be paid for, the same carer to bring continuity for each person, living wages and professional training for carers. Lancashire County Council is one of only a few who have so far adopted these standards, but an "early day motion" (345) is scheduled to raise the idea in Parliament. They also have a cunning plan to increase membership by approaching organisations and offering learning and training opportunities before encouraging union membership.

Discussion points and comments included: ‘Why should we feel guilty about growing old?’; ‘Everyone should have the right to join a union’; ‘There is an ideological contradiction in the profit making outlook of private companies involved in care that is morally wrong’. Suggestions varied from ‘We need to be inventive and creative to make campaigns stand out’ to statements that ‘We need and deserve a more equal society’.

Janet Shapiro reminded us of **the role and structure of the NPC** and the Women’s Working Party, pointing out the lack of women on the committees and calling for more contributions from us to the Women’s Network Exchange newsletter. She mentioned too, Dot Gibson (NPC General Secretary) and the ‘Generations United’ campaign to try to counter accusations that ‘This is all your fault’ aimed at the so called ‘Baby Boomers’ who apparently are being unhelpfully long-lived!

Rosie McGregor raised our awareness of the desperate situations arising from ‘**Fuel Poverty**’, telling us this is a huge issue and examining hidden aspects of Government initiatives such as the ‘Warm Homes and Energy Act’ which is measured by cost of fuel and household income, with energy suppliers taking too much profit. She also described the dire problems arising from people having to decide between food and fuel, leading to knock-on effects such as becoming more prone to disease, depression, loneliness and greater use of the NHS. Apparently in the UK our houses are much colder than those in other EU countries with up to 50 people a day dying in winter because of this. Other heart-stopping aspects Rosie mentioned concerned the replacement of electricity meters by pre-pay meters, so companies are not said to be illegally cutting power off, and requests for cold food at food banks when people cannot afford to cook.

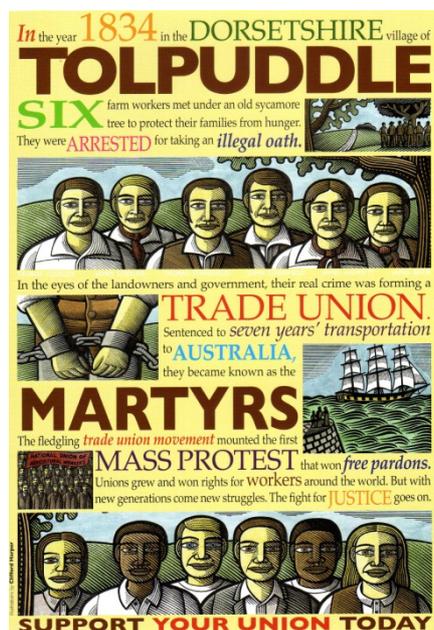
Positive suggestions included: greater use of sustainable energy (this is really efficient), re-nationalisation of energy systems and action to end fuel poverty.

Finally, **Judith Brown of Age UK** spoke about a local Lottery-funded project she is involved in, ‘Bristol Aging Better’ which is trying to create an ‘Age-Friendly City’ and help to combat loneliness among older people. Points raised from this included suggestions that portrayal of the NHS as inefficient is untrue and a deliberate campaign, that older women from black and ethnic minority communities can be overlooked, but also that older people are assets and problem solvers rather than a burden. This was an enlightening and worrying conference in many ways, giving much food for thought about how the world around us has changed and is changing, not always for the better, but there were also signs of hope and encouragement to get more involved and try to do something, however small, to help.

Useful websites: UCU campaigns update on www.ucu.org.uk, www.nhsbill2015.org.uk
www.thepeoplesnhs.org, www.ageuk.org
www.unison.org.uk (look at ‘campaigns’)
www.energy-uk.org.uk, www.endfuelpoverty.org.uk
Rowena Dawson

7. Pilgrimage to Tolpuddle

On holiday in Dorset recently, I was determined to visit Tolpuddle and the Martyrs Museum. Having previously only had a hazy idea of any details of the story, I found it very enlightening and interesting.



Rowena in front of the famous tree where the union met

As I am sure some of you will well know, the ‘martyrs’ were agricultural labourers suffering dreadful poverty through low and falling wages and unemployment. Before ordinary workers had rights to vote, the 1800s was the era of the beginning of the trade union and protest movements. So when George Loveless and fellow Tolpuddle villagers got together to try and resolve their desperate situation, they decided to form a union and were helped by the ‘Grand National Trades Union’ led by Robert Owen. Part of the process involved taking an oath to maintain trust and secrecy in their affairs.

Local employers and magistrates became very nervous about these activities and had ‘ringleaders’ arrested. As Trade Unions had become legal since 1824, other means were found to convict them. The final charge being that they had joined an ‘illegal society ... to which they had bound themselves by unlawful oaths.’ The fact that taking

oaths within organisations such as Freemasons and Orange Lodges was usual practice did not at first seem to be a problem to those in power.

The men were convicted and transported to Australia for seven years where they had an extremely hard time to say the least. Meanwhile, wives and families were supported by “The London Dorchester Committee” and public subscription; very large demonstrations were held, and eventually, the men were pardoned in March 1836. As they gradually arrived home, they were welcomed with great celebrations.

Nowadays the Martyrs are remembered not only in the museum and other places, but at the “Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival” held annually in July. The museum has interesting and informative displays including original documents and an excellent website where the full story and linked information can be found.

For more info see: www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk and *The Story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs* TUC booklet, 4th edition

Rowena Dawson

8. What Future for the NHS?

By now it is clear that every politician in the land loves the NHS passionately and wishes to smother it in innumerable big sloppy kisses. The amount of money they are prepared to inject is more rigorously quantified and tightly restricted. The Wanless Report of 2002 into the NHS made it clear that reorganisations and the hunt for efficiencies were peripheral; a lot more money was needed. The same remains true today. Simon Stevens, the new head of the NHS, and worryingly fresh from his involvement with US private health care firms, has argued that further “efficiencies” of over £20bn together with £8bn extra funding are required to safeguard the NHS.

Over the past 5 years the NHS has suffered a cut of £20bn. The total shortfall by 2021 is now forecast by the chief economist for the Nuffield Trust to reach £30bn. Britain has been falling down the OECD charts for health spending as a proportion of GDP and is now 15th, lower even than Portugal. NHS funding is currently 9% of GDP whereas that in Germany, France and Italy is 11-12%. That is the extent of the challenge our politicians face. The situation for social care is, according to the Nuffield Foundation, even bleaker: cuts of over £600m to adult social care since 2010 mean that almost a third fewer older adults receive publicly funded care now than in 2010.

The Kings Trust has just published “**A new settlement for health and social care**” This is the final report of the independent Commission on the Future of Health and Social Care in England (the Barker Commission). Its findings are controversial but, nevertheless, shine a light on the obfuscations of political warm words.

It explains that demands for health and social care in England are increasing. Technological and other medical advances will bring cost pressures. An ageing population will add to these. There are also demands for a better standard of social care (and for a better-paid social care workforce).

The Report calls for a merging of health and social care provision. The Care Act 2014 will, from 2016, start to cap

the lifetime costs to the individual of the assessed need for social care at £72,000 – this does not include so-called hotel costs. It is important to note that the cap applies only to *eligible* needs – that is, those that a local authority assesses to be necessary. The Report makes an important point: “It was hoped that the cap on lifetime costs would allow an insurance market to emerge to help cover the significant costs that people will still have to meet. But there are very few signs of that happening”. Indeed, even after meetings with Government, “the insurers show little appetite for producing the new products that would be needed. That market failure suggests to us that there will need to be more public intervention if our goal of more equal support for equal need is to be met.” The Report also makes the blindingly obvious point that such a cap would be “unthinkable if it were applied to health.” Even more obvious is that the market offers only dangers to the NHS.

The Barker Commission accepts that extra money must be found and some of their suggestions are very controversial. These include: a revamped prescription charge; means testing of winter fuel payments and free TV licences; rationalising the treatment of accommodation costs in health and social care; and ending the exemption from employees’ National Insurance contributions when people work on past state pension age. They also propose a 1p increase in the rate of National Insurance for those aged over 40 as a health and social care contribution. Eventually, other tax changes would need to be considered, including new wealth taxes. These include: an increase to 3% in the additional rate of National Insurance for those above the upper earnings limit, reforms to inheritance tax, a wealth transfer tax, and changes to capital gains and property taxation. Some of these tax changes would take place over the dead bodies of many prominent politicians.

Prescription charges for all would be introduced. Under this approach, medical exemptions and the low-income scheme would be abolished for all, including pensioners, but no one would face a medicines bill of more than £104 a year on the current cap. There is a very important argument against this. In the Commonwealth Fund’s 2013 survey of 11 countries, patients in the United Kingdom were appreciably the least likely not to have filled a prescription, not to have visited the doctor with a medical problem, or not to have pursued their recommended care **because of cost**. The relative figures are: UK 4%, Germany 15%, France 18%, Netherlands 22% and USA 37%. So the present system gets this right.

Their final point is “the Government adopt the recommendation of the Wanless review of 2002 and institute a regular review of the health and social care needs of the country and the spending required to meet them.” Such a review might give us a more accurate financial understanding than at present.

Clearly, this is a mixed bag of proposals. It is, however, serious, unlike much of the present political waffle, and it enables us to grapple with some of the future threats to the NHS and refine our arguments for the upcoming General Election.

Julian Atkinson

The American Way of Healthcare

Total health spending in the US is a colossal \$2.7 trillion a year, or 17% of GDP, twice the proportion in the UK. Nobody knows exactly how much of that is stolen, but Donald Berwick, former head of the Centres for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and Andrew Hackbarth of the RAND Corporation have made the most thorough and detailed attempt to establish the facts. They have concluded that fraud, and the extra rules and inspections required to fight it, add as much as \$98bn, or about 10%, to annual Medicare and Medicaid spending, and up to \$272bn across the entire US healthcare system. By 2013 federal prosecutors had over 2,000 health-fraud probes in operation. Berwick and Hackbarth explain that the following forms of waste account for at least 21% of U.S. health care spending, but it may extend to the following figures:

- * Failures of care delivery, which the authors say cost up to \$154 billion in 2011;
- * Failures of coordinated care, which cost up to \$45 billion in 2011;
- * Overtreatment, which cost up to \$226 billion in 2011;
- * Administrative complexity, which cost up to \$389 billion in 2011;
- * Pricing failures, which cost up to \$178 billion in 2011; and
- * Fraud and abuse, which cost up to \$272 billion in 2011.

Care Homes: the 10 worst performing counties

A study was compiled by care provider Caring Homes that revealed Nottinghamshire's care homes were the worst-performing in the country. The results showed that 123 out of the county's 345 homes had failed at least one check during their latest CQC inspection. There are 32 counties where 15% or less of care homes failed checks, compared to Notts' figure of 36%. The ten worst-performing counties are:

- **Nottinghamshire** – 36%
- **Derbyshire** – 33%
- **Leicestershire** – 20%
- West Midlands 26%, Dorset – 21%
- Hertfordshire – 20%, Northumberland – 19%,
- Staffordshire – 18%, West Sussex – 18 %

The study covers 15,963 care homes nationally and included inspections carried out up to June this year. This is bad news for the East Midlands.

TTIP

The row over TTIP (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership deal between the EU and the USA) and the inclusion of an ISDS (Investor State Dispute Settlement) mechanism continues. The ISDS could potentially mean that, if any privatisation within the NHS was reversed, the aggrieved company could seek damages from our government.

A good example of how ISDS works is the Uruguayan government versus Philip Morris case. The Swiss-based tobacco giant accused Uruguay of violating the bilateral investment treaty between Switzerland and Uruguay, saying that anti-smoking legislation (such as Uruguay's 'single presentation' ordinance and its requirement that health warnings cover 80% of a cigarette pack) devalues its cigarette trademarks and investments. The company is seeking financial compensation.

Julian Atkinson

9. UCU Retired Members Branch

The branch has been underway for four years with over 200 members. The aims are diverse, but include bringing together retired members of UCU in the East Midlands, giving advice to branches on pension and retired members' matters, campaigning on issues relating to retired members and representation to the UCU national congress, National Pensioners Convention, Local TUCs. If you previously worked outside the East Midlands, but lived or now live in the East Midlands, please join our branch.

Meetings: We hold meetings three times a year, in places of interest to make part of a day and lunch out. The meetings centre round important issues for UCU pensioners and give a chance to chat to other retired members.

Newsletter: A termly newsletter with useful articles for retired UCU members is sent to all branch members for whom we have email addresses and to UCU branch secretaries in the East Midlands.

Email addresses: We encourage retired members to use their home email for when you give up your work email address. Please let us have your email address and also changes to your email address.

**For more information
please contact Julian Atkinson
e-mail: jdatkinson34@btinternet.com
telephone: 01773 532105**

East Midlands Branch officers and committee

Chair: Angus McLardy apmclardy@btinternet.com
Vice Chair: Rowena Dawson jeanrowena@hotmail.co.uk
Secretary: Julian Atkinson jdatkinson34@btinternet.com
Assistant Secretary: Rob Kirkwood rsmkirkwood@gmail.com
Treasurer: Brian Hambidge brianhambidge@ntlworld.com
Women's officer: Lucretia Packman
paul@lucretiagardens.freemove.co.uk
Membership: Greg Cejer greg@greggthebuilder.plus.com
Newsletter: Russ Bowman b Bowman@dorothyplus.com
East Midlands regional UCU committee representatives:
Brian Hambidge, Russ Bowman

Roles and functions for retired members branches

The branch committee has drawn up a list of roles and functions of the retired members branch. These will be discussed at the next branch meeting in March.

- * To represent the interests of retired members within the union.
- * To represent the interests of retired union members within the wider union and pensioner movements.
- * To provide a forum within the union for retired members to come together to consider and debate matters of mutual interest.
- * To provide a resource of collective memory, advice and expertise in support of the union, in particular to those still in active employment.
- * To provide active support, where appropriate, by involving the broadest section of the branch in support of the wider interests of the union and its members, including support for those still in active employment.

10. October branch meeting

The meeting was held in Loughborough and the speaker was Professor Andreas Bieler on 'The Fight of Unions Against Austerity.'

Tensions within trades unions. There was often a tension between the need to fight just for our own members and our wider responsibilities. Our sector cannot ignore the wider problems of falling wages, attacks on pension rights in other sectors etc. We needed to link up with other groups in struggle since there were important social movements outside of a weakened union movement.

The connection with the Labour Party. The trades unions are part of the Labour Party and we do have better access to Government when Labour is in power. However, the Labour party didn't endorse or support the 10th July strike even though Len McCluskey had very recently given them unconditional support in a conference speech and the Labour governments did not repeal anti-TU legislation. We may need to follow the Norwegian example and be more independent of the party – there they drew up a list of demands for the next election and said they would endorse all parties who supported their demands.

The right to strike. Our 14th October strike had to be called off because of an injunction and this is another sign that our right to strike is in danger. He reminded us that this right was won by actions in the past that were illegal and suggested we need to be more forceful in safeguarding and maintaining this right. We should also look across Europe at different ways of resisting austerity, e.g. the indignados in

Spain, occupying squares etc. Trades unions have been on the margins of these struggles – perhaps we should be more open to supporting innovative protests (e.g. UK uncut) or risk being marginalised. Last Saturday's anti-austerity demo wasn't very well supported. The very large factories that had been the heartlands for unions were diminishing. We should learn from those unions, such as in South Africa, which might appear to have a smaller trade union density but were so much more effective in mobilising unorganised allies.

The meeting was also the annual general meeting of the branch. New officers are Rowena Dawson replacing Ann Donlan as vice-chair and Lucretia Packham replacing Rowena as women's officer. Thanks were given to Ann for her hard work over the years.

Helen Chester

11. A lot more information and news can be obtained from these websites. We recommend that you have a browse.

UCU National Website: <http://www.ucu.org.uk>

AgeUK: <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/>

68 is too late: www.68istoolate.org.uk

National Pensioners Convention (NPC): <http://npcuk.org>

East Midlands NPC: <http://leicesternpcgroup.btck.co.uk/>

Pensioners' Manifesto 2015

Despite what some may claim, Britain's older generation are not to blame for the economic crisis. Neither does it help when the media suggests that there is a conflict between young and old, especially when the age groups share the same concerns over affordable housing, public transport, low incomes and retirement ages.

But growing older can be a real challenge. Britain's state pension is amongst the least adequate in the developed world, some of the stories surrounding the care of older people are absolutely shocking and last winter over 30,000 pensioners died from the cold.

A country can be said to be judged by the way it treats its young and older members. That is why we need a series of policies that improve the lives of Britain's 11m pensioners, as well as protecting future generations of older people.

At the General Election we will call on candidates to support our Pensioners' Manifesto that will put the concerns of older people at the heart of the political process.



- A basic state pension for all, set above the poverty level of £175 a week
- Increases in pensions to be linked to the best of RPI, CPI, earnings or 2.5%
- Universal pensioner benefits (bus pass, winter fuel allowance, free TV licences for the over75s and free prescriptions) to be maintained without means-testing
- A National Health and Care Service which is free at the point of use and funded through taxation
- A legally binding Dignity Code to improve the quality and standards of care for older people

NPC
NATIONAL
PENSIONERS
CONVENTION

For more information about the NPC's policies visit www.npcuk.org or call 020-7383-0388