

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION

Meeting of Retired Members Branches 30 October 2019: note on motions passed from the chair

I undertook to circulate an annotated version of the motions as passed to (a) appropriate designated recipients, as well as NEC, and (b) to branches and delegates to this meeting with notes indicating possible action. I introduced a paper on the motions to the NEC meeting on 29 November.

I hope that branches will find the notes below useful for reporting back from the annual meeting.

Alastair Hunter

Chair of the RMB meeting

Motions 1, 8 and 11 address the question of how to achieve an acceptable level of state pension, bearing in mind a number of recent high profile reports on the supposed “intergenerational crisis”. Branches might be able to address concerns in this area to regional NPC groups, where they exist, TUC local branches, and MPs.

Motion 1 Intergenerational Fairness [Yorkshire & Humberside Retired Members Branch]

This meeting rejects the view that intergenerational fairness should mean equal misery for all or that future pensioners should have no benefits to look forward to in old age.

It condemns the proposals from the House of Lords Select Committee on Intergenerational Fairness and Provision to end the triple lock on state pensions, to postpone for future generations the right to the bus pass and winter fuel allowance until five years after the date of retirement and to tax these benefits.

It supports universal benefits for senior citizens, funded through general taxation, as a basis for social solidarity and ending poverty in old age.

It salutes the work of the NPC in exposing the myths around intergenerational fairness and resolves to raise awareness of all UCU members, including future pensioners, on this issue.

Motion 11 Level of the State pension [Scottish Retired Members Branch]

This AGM notes that whereas recent Reports by the Resolution Foundation and the House of Lords Select Committee on Intergenerational Fairness have advocated the abolition of the Triple lock, both have accepted that pensions should be indexed in line with earnings; thus retaining the earnings link that was broken by the Thatcher Government in 1980. The logical conclusion is that the link with earnings is fully justifiable and therefore should never have been broken in the first place.

If the State Pension were now to be restored to the level it would have been, had the earnings-link never been broken, then it would rise by some £63 per week, which is not far from the current NPC policy of 70% of the Living Wage.

This AGM believes that a criterion of the restoration of the status quo ante regarding the earnings-link would have greater resonance with the public and would be harder for politicians of all parties to resist than current NPC policy.

We further note that when in 2015 the NPC changed its policy from advocating a pension of at least the Officially recognised Poverty Level (60% of the median wage) to a level of 70% of the Living wage, the latter was significantly higher than the former. However, now 70% of the Living wage is considerably less than 60% of the median wage.

This AGM therefore calls on the NPC to re-visit its policy regarding the appropriate level of the state pension. We would prefer the adoption of the criterion of restoring the pension to what it would have been, had the earnings link never been broken or, reversion to the previous policy of a State Pension of at Least the Officially recognised Poverty Level.

Motion 8 Seeking Justice for Women Facing Retirement [Southern Retired Members Branch]

This meeting recognizes the injustice experienced by women whose state pensions have been deferred without adequate notification. The consequences have been that those affected were unable to make long-term financial plans and some are now experiencing significant hardship.

This meeting calls on the NEC to undertake an active campaign, together with other trades unions and campaign groups to seek justice for the many retired UCU members and others who have been disadvantaged.

Motions 2, 4 and 7 deal with areas where we, as retired members, wish to express both ideological and practical support for colleagues in the workplace. Branches could pass these on, where appropriate, to local activists, and offer their hands-on support as indicated in Motion 4.

Motion 2 Solidarity with Further Education Members [Yorkshire & Humberside Retired Members Branch]

This meeting declares its solidarity with UCU members in Further Education who are involved in disputes to protect educational provision and jobs. It supports campaigns for greater investment in Further Education, believing that the existence of an FE sector is crucial for social justice and widening participation in education.

It congratulates UCU branches in FE who have negotiated and taken strike action to improve pay and conditions of service and obtain greater job security for casualised staff. It condemns those employers who have responded by victimising union activists and demands the reinstatement of victimised union representatives and members.

It pledges the solidarity of members in RMBs to our members in the FE sector in their just struggles for education and better working conditions and against victimisation.

Motion 4 Involvement of Members [East Midlands Retired Members Branch]

This Annual Meeting of RMBs recognises that, whereas there are limitations to the active involvement of all members in the branches and their activities, efforts should be made to mobilise

our paper memberships. The Pension and other disputes and the GTVO campaigns are an opportunity for our less active members to be mobilised. As part of that process branches should produce their own statements on the role of RMBs which would include a clause such as “To provide active support, where appropriate, by involving the widest section of the branch in support of the wider interests of the union and its members, including support for those still in active employment.”

Addendum: statement adopted by East Midlands RMB

ROLES AND FUNCTION OF RMB

- 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 wider union, in particular to those still in active employment.
- To provide active support, where appropriate, by involving the widest section of the branch in support of the wider interests of the union and its members, including support for those still in active employment.

Motion 7 Right-to-work checks – Hostile Environment [London Retired Members Branch]

We consider the practice of photocopying passports as part of right-to-work checks at higher education institutions to endanger the personal security of individual members. It is simply unnecessary for short-term roles such as PhD examiners, REF advisers and similar activities often undertaken by retired members. The photocopying of passports for such short-term roles should stop forthwith.

Motions 12 and 13 deal with matters of internal UCU practice. Motion 13 in particular will be brought to UCU Congress by the Scottish Branch: the branch would welcome indications of support.
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Motion 12 Information available to branches regarding retirees [Scottish Retired Members Branch]

This AGM notes that Branches are handicapped by a lack of information about which of their members have retired.

We invite the NEC to consult with appropriate representatives of Retired Members and to consider how relevant information might be shared with Branches.

We further request that Headquarters should consider writing to all members, prior to their retirement, to invite them to remain as active trade unionists and supporters of the interests of pensioners by:

- i) Joining their UCU Retired Members’ Branch
- ii) joining an appropriate NPC local Group or Region
- iii) Becoming a Friend of the NPC

iv) making a donation to the NPC

Motion 13 Retired Members and Motions to Congress [Scottish Retired Members Branch]

This AGM notes that

RMBs cannot submit motions to Sector Conferences;

in recent years motions from RMBs on Pensions, a legitimate area of concern to retired members, have been rejected as reserved to Sectors;

this results in the disenfranchisement of retired members in an area of direct concern to them.

We therefore request NEC to address this problem, and to consider two proposals in particular, without ruling out other suggestions:

- (i) a specific session in Congress proper where wider pension matters might be discussed, recognising that the particular details of the schemes remain the preserve of the relevant sector conferences.
- (ii) amending the CBC guidelines to the effect that where an RMB submits a motion to Congress which, though deemed by CBC to be sectoral, is clearly of legitimate concern to retired members, said motion may, at the discretion of CBC, be added to the appropriate sectoral business.

Motions 3, 5, 6, 9 and 10 cover wider matters of social concern which branches are invited to consider. Suggestions for specific action would be welcome and could be shared via the regular mailings to branch secretaries. Communication can be effected by emailing Alastair Hunter (alastair189@live.co.uk) or Paul Cottrell (pcottrell@ucu.org.uk) – or even both at once!

Motion 3 Support for Nuclear Weapons Ban [Yorkshire & Humberside Retired Members Branch]

This meeting is deeply concerned about the grave threat that nuclear weapons pose to communities throughout the world and to the huge sums of money wasted on their research, development, testing and deployment. We firmly believe that the money spent on nuclear weapons would be much better spent on welfare and education, including welfare for senior citizens. Citizens also have the right to live in a world free from the threat of a nuclear confrontation. Any use of nuclear weapons, whether deliberate or accidental, would have catastrophic, far-reaching and long-lasting consequences for people and the environment. Therefore, we support the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and call on our towns, and cities to support it and our government to sign it.

Motion 5 Retired EU Citizens [London Retired Members Branch]

We call upon UCU to defend the rights of our retired members, who are **non-UK** EU citizens, to their continued residence in the UK, their voting rights and pensions

Motion 6 Just Transition [London Retired Members Branch]

As older people, affordable heating, warm homes as well as free public transport is especially important to us

We demand a just transition from fossil fuel to renewable energy, starting immediately with the phasing out of North Sea oil and gas extraction,

We demand an immediate programme for the safe insulation and draught-proofing of all homes, public buildings and businesses, as recommended in the One Million Climate Jobs booklet produced by the Campaign Against Climate Change

We demand an immediate nationwide Free Public Transport for all with a vast expansion of the network.

Motion 9 Generation Rent and Housing Provision [Northern Retired Members Branch]

This Annual Meeting notes that many people in employment today, including many younger college and university staff, are living in rented accommodation well beyond an age at which people could have expected in the past to buy a property to live in.

As "generation rent" becomes older and enters retirement, there is a danger that many more future pensioners will be without adequate housing. Private landlords may be less willing to rent properties to retired people than to younger people who are in work. Unless there is a significant expansion of social housing there is a potential housing crisis for future generations of pensioners.

This Annual Meeting requests the NEC to work with other trade unions and appropriate campaigning and charitable groups concerned with housing, to raise awareness of this issue and to contribute to policy solutions.

Motion 10 Solidarity with Windrush Generation, Stop the Deportations [Northern Retired Members Branch]

This Annual Meeting condemns the continuing deportations of members of the Windrush Generation and other migrants and refugees who should be allowed to stay in the UK.

It condemns the hostile climate and the persecution of members of the Windrush Generation. These citizens and their descendants have made major contributions to the UK and should be allowed to live in peace and dignity. We demand full compensation for those who have lost jobs, housing and income, and been unjustly deported.

It supports UCU's continuing work of educating its members about this issue and campaigning to end deportations.