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No.34 January 2024

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 and members are welcome to contact us anytime.

Tony Staunton chair SWRMB

1. Branch meetings.

A branch meeting is planned for Tuesday 6th February 2024.

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.

Unusually there has been only one new member to this branch since the previous, September 2023, newsletter. If you have any suggestions for the newsletter we are happy to hear from you.

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.

For more information please contact:

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or contact the officers below:

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3. 150 years of Struggle.

In 1973 Bristol Trades Union Council (BTC) marked its centenary year. Bob Whitfield and the late David Large wrote its history for the Bristol Historical Association and BBC Bristol screened 100 Years of Struggle, a film produced by the council.

Now in 2023, to celebrate the Trade Council's 150th anniversary, Colin Thomas has brought the story up-to-date in the Bristol Radical Pamphleteer pamphlet #58.



Robert Musgrove, a member of SWRMB, was at the Bristol Radical History Group stall selling the book. Here is an extract from page 72. In the winter of 2022/23, the government threw down the gauntlet to trade unions in the

U.K., not only resisting demands for wage increases to meet inflation but also proposing more trade union legislation. The BTC responded promptly and 6000 turned out to march & attend a mass meeting of those unions involved in industrial action on 1st February 2023 - the National Education Union, The University and College Union, the Civil Service Union, the Rail and Maritime Union and the Association of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen.

"When delegates act in comradeship and solidarity, representing their workmates rather than any particular political faction, the BTC can still play an effective role in achieving a better society."

In the 1980s I attended Bristol Trades Union Council Meetings because when Ron Press, with whom I worked, asked me why I wasn't attending, I didn't have an answer.



Stephanie Tailby, SWRMB at the TUC 150th anniversary event where the book was on sale for £8.

I asked ChatGPT* to write a Shakespearean Sonnet on Trade Unions.

*In days of old when guilds did first arise,
With artisans and workers side by side,
They sought to gain more rights, a grand
emprise,
In unity, their strength could not subside.
The tradesmen, banded, formed the unions
strong,
To fight for better wages, hours, and more,
Their voices raised in unison, a throng,
To break the chains of labor they abhor.
Through strikes and pickets, they would
make their stand,
And in the factories, they toiled long,
In sweat and tears, they forged a better
land,
Their legacy, a force forever strong.
So, history tells of unions' noble quest,
To champion workers' rights, they were
the best.*

**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'. We rely Copyright Free material for the branch newsletter, ChatGPT does not. It also uses American English.

4. Cheltenham Rally

Protect the Right to Strike - March and Rally, Cheltenham Saturday 27th January 2024 at noon, Montpellier Gardens.

You may have seen the exciting news that Cheltenham is hosting the National TUC 'Protect the Right to Strike' March and Rally on Saturday 27 January 2024. This event is also to celebrate the win by GCHQ Trade Unions for the right to belong to a Trade Union on the weekend of the 40th anniversary of the announcement of the ban.

More details on the leaflet here:

<file:///C:/Users/Jo/Downloads/Protect%20the%20Right%20to%20Strike%20Leaflet.pdf>



An original from 1987 courtesy of Mike Farmer SWRMB.

Simon Smith, Cheltenham and District
Trades Union Council

5. PSPC Nov Inflation comment

As you may know, the latest inflation figures for November were published by the ONS 20th Dec 2023.

The three indices are:

RPI = 5.3% (down from 6.1% in October)

CPI = 3.9% (Down from 4.6% in October)
RPI-CPI Gap = 1.4pp (down from 1.5pp in October)

CPIH = 4.2% (Down from 4.7% in October.)
RPI-CPIH Gap = 1.1pp (down from 1.4pp in October)

These figures have shown a larger than expected fall (although of course, prices are still rising faster than the Government's target of 2%), which seems to have surprised everyone. Opinions differ about exactly why this should be. I won't hazard a guess.

We still see a substantial gap between RPI (which many experts, including the Royal Statistical Society regard as a more valid measure of the increase in the cost of living for the average household)) and the (invariably lower) CPI index which the Government uses to uplift pensions and other benefits. There is also a substantial gap between RPI and CPIH which the Government plans to replace CPI in 2030.

When the figures for October 2023 were published, I noted that for the first time in 26 months, CPI had been closer to zero than CPIH. It was unclear why this was so. One possible explanation which was alluded to by at least one commentator was that the change in

the Energy Price Cap imposed by the Government had reduced expenditure in the area of housing and utilities. This may have affected CPIH (which includes an estimate of housing costs) more than CPI (which does not).

As colleagues will see, CPI is again closer to zero than CPIH in November. We will have to watch this trend closely to see if it continues. It does surprise me, since during this period of high inflation, CPIH has been consistently and substantially closer to zero than CPI. To try to understand this better, I have looked at the last period in which inflation climbed substantially above the Government's 2% target.

In the 13 months from March 2017 to March 2018, during which CPI peaked at 3%, CPI and CPIH were identical for 3 of those months. For the remaining 10, CPIH (mean = 2.62) was closer to zero than CPI (Mean = 2.79). The pattern is clearly the same as we have seen recently, so I still believe that it is right to campaign against the Government's plan to replace CPI by CPIH. Of course, we should really like to see a return to RPI for obvious reasons.

A further relevant consideration is that, in my opinion, any Government tends to choose its preferred index not on grounds of statistical purity or

fairness to claimants, but on a calculation of what will reduce its costs most effectively. If, as I do not expect (and has not occurred previously) CPIH were to prove to be more generous for a sustained period, then I would expect the Government to stick to CPI, or find some other even less generous index. Forgive my cynicism.

The figures this month do represent better news for anyone struggling to pay their bills notwithstanding the fact that prices are still rising and pensions will not increase for many months yet. However, the energy market is still very volatile and this is a major contributor to changes in the cost of living. Next month could produce equally unexpected and less good news.

On that note of caution, I will wish you all, Merry Christmas.

Philip Burgess.
UCU RMB Committee.

6. UCU Annual Equality Conference. November 2023.

Registration for the conference is open to every member and we self-identify to select the groups sessions we wish to attend. It was a hybrid event & I attended online.



Ellen Clifford

Others were f2f in Manchester. All papers for the conference were available in advance at <https://www.ucu.org.uk/equalitypapers23/> and I presume will remain there if you wish to consult them. I say 'presume' as there were comments from the floor that the UCU website is still inaccessible for some members and I note that generally, finding anything on the website is difficult.

I noticed retired members from the following other RM branches: Southern, North West, Eastern & Home Counties, Yorks & Humberside & Eastern.

Southern RMB had a motion on Rail Ticket Office closures. Martin Geddy said that *"we have been overtaken by events and this dreadful proposal has now been withdrawn. Forcing the government into a u-turn on this issue is a great example of what can be achieved when trades unions, disability rights groups and concerned citizens combine their efforts"*.

Kevin Daws, City of Bristol College, has been Vice-Chair of the Disabled Members' Standing Committee since January 2023. He reported: *I am currently involved in helping to organise webinars for Disability History Month (Nov 2023)* <https://ukdhm.org/> who's aim is *for all councils, service providers, education establishments, youth, play and*

sports organisations, health providers and employers to examine their approaches to disabled children and youth.

Ellen Clifford gave us an insight to the government plans to tighten the work capability assessment and why she believes it will force many disabled people into poverty, or even destitution.

Ellen won the 2021 Bread & Roses Radical Publishing Award for her book *The War on Disabled People*.

In the Women's members Annual Conference Mabel Encinas shared her poem: *Your Child*. You can read the poem at

<https://whisperingdialogue.com/2019/10/15/your-child-%D8%B7%D9%81%D9%84%D9%83/>

Here is one verse:

*I am a child, your child,
yours although we look different,
yours although you are not my
biological parent,
yours although I live in another
latitude.*

Our links are inherent.

In the Plenary session there were many interesting speakers. I have picked a couple.

Reem Abu-Hayyeh, a Racial Justice campaigner at Amnesty, spoke on Prevent – the UK's strategy 'to stop people becoming terrorists', and the impact on our students.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/prevent>

Reem mentioned the work of Tarek Younis.

[https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2023-11/Amnesty%20UK%20Prevent%20report%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2023-11/Amnesty%20UK%20Prevent%20report%20(1).pdf)

Anthony Brown's father was a civil engineer in Jamaica who came to Britain at the request of the British Government to help rebuild after the war. Anthony shared his own experience of the 'Windrush Scandal'

<https://www.jcwi.org.uk/windrush-scandal-explained>

when he received his deportation order. He became a co-founder of Windrush Defenders Legal C.I.C. <https://windrushnationalorganisation.com/>
Anthony, an OU law graduate, is on a crusade for a Windrush Act. He is a member of the Home Office's Windrush Stakeholder Advisory Group and an advocate member of Windrush National Organisation lawyer.

Overall I count my two days well spent in the company of activists and UCU colleagues.

Jo Corke SWRMB

7. An exhibition: Brilliant Black British History

Thursday, 5 October 2023 10:00 to Sunday, 28 January 2024 17:00. Venue: 1 Windrush Square, Brixton SW2 1EF

A captivating world of Black British history. Perfect for families and history enthusiasts. Bring your family along to explore, learn, and reflect together. It's an excellent opportunity to introduce young

minds to the diverse heritage that makes up Britain.

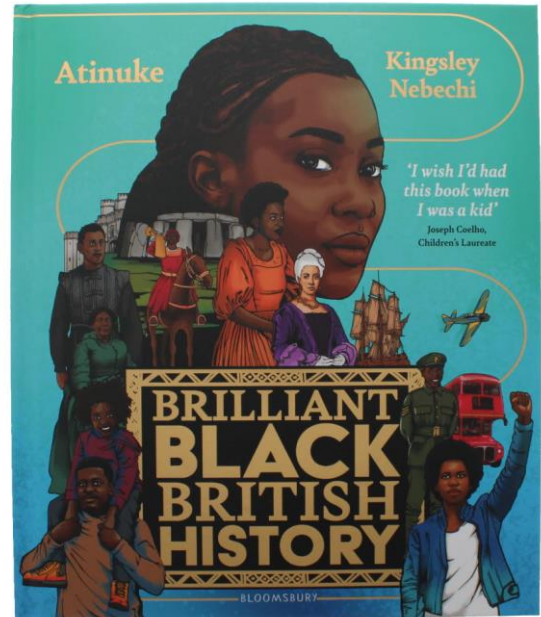


Photo and text with permission from Black Cultural Archives.

The book is an eye-opening story of the history of Britain, focusing on a part of our past that has mostly been left out of the history books: Black British history.

From science and sport to education and law, celebrate the hard work of brilliant Black people from different backgrounds that have helped build Britain. Learn about key and complex historical topics such as the world wars, slavery, the industrial revolution, Windrush and the Black Lives Matter movement. This fascinating book may change everything you thought you knew.

More information on the exhibition:

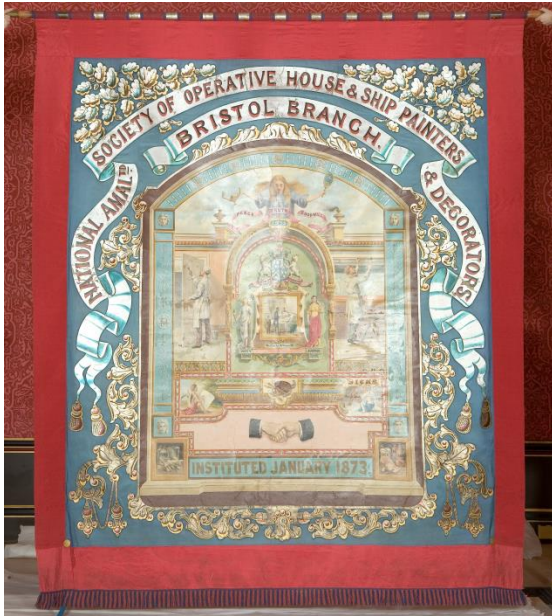
<https://www.bcaexhibits.org/exhibits/brilliant-black-british-history>

Every October is Black History Month.

Jo Corke SW RMB

8. Banner Bright.

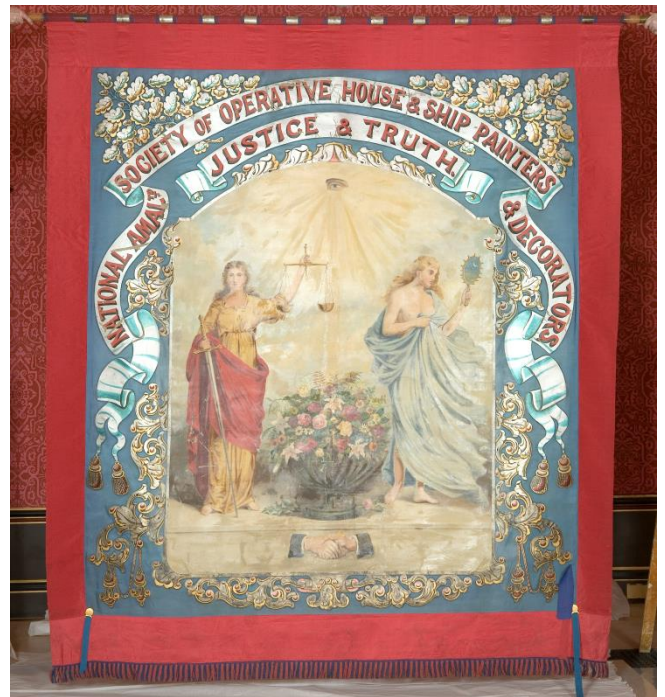
This is the silk, trade union banner for the '*National Amalgamated Society of Operative House & Ship Painters & Decorators, Bristol Branch, Instituted January 1873*'.



Some online histories of this union seem to indicate it formed as an amalgamation in 1904, other sources suggest 1886, yet another 1855; the banner has the date 1873. Someone with an interest in Trade Union history might like to find out more and send me an article in the next newsletter.

Presumably lost for some time, it was discovered in 1967 in the basement of Kingsley Hall, Old Market, Bristol. In 1968 during the TUC centenary celebrations, a competition was held to find the best banner in the city. The painters' banner was successful and was presented to the city by George

Woodcock, general secretary of the TUC at that time.¹



This magnificent banner is now in the Bristol City Museum collection. I contacted Bristol Museums; it is now at the M-Shed²; all their TU their banners are fragile and are stored in acid-free tissue so they are not available for general viewing. The M-Shed made the decision to take high-res photos of them for public use. They kindly gave me the collection archived images, back and front, for this article and waived the usual fees for us.

Kingsley Hall, with its medieval cellar and walls, has a history going back 3 centuries. The hall was built as a private house in 1706. Following a period as a Conservative Club in the 19th century, it was opened in 1911 as the headquarters of the Independent Labour Party by the party's founder, Keir Hardie.^{3,4}

The Hall has played a significant role in the history of social change in Bristol – from meetings of the Suffragettes to debating wars, workers' pay and conditions, gentrification, and housing. The Hall's link to social change continues today as home to the South West's largest youth homelessness charity.

Refs.

1. *Banner Bright* is a book by John Gorman, 1973; my edition is the revised 1986. For those interested in TU banners it is fascinating.
2. <https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/m-shed/>
3. <https://thebristolmayor.com/2023/05/01/kingsley-hall/>
4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingsley_Hall,_Bristol

Jo Corke SW RMB

9. A turning tide: improvements in colleges' finances since 2019/20

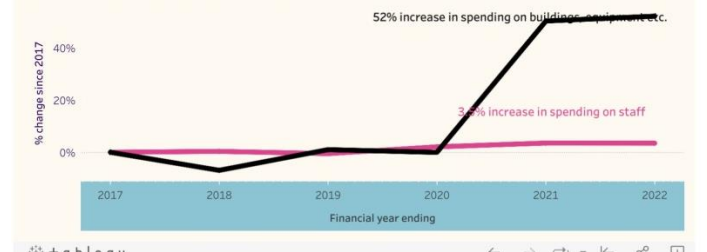
I was in my local greengrocers one Saturday in October when I overheard a conversation about the lack of specialist teachers at College.

A group of students had made representations to the college, but they were told the college couldn't recruit enough specialist teachers.

I wondered why; following the detective model, I *followed the money* and checked it out...

From the UCU website:
Colleges have massively increased their capital expenditure spending on buildings and other fixed assets in the last two years; the same is not

true of their spending on staff. Despite the recent increases in student funding staff costs last year were only significantly slightly higher than they were in 2016 and 2017.



The black line reads: 52% increase in spending on buildings, equipment etc. The red line: 3.5% increase in spending on staff.

After many difficult years the FE sector is starting to recover financially mainly thanks to the increases in 16-19 funding. More colleges are now in surplus each year in other words making more than they spend. Colleges have much more cash in the bank and they're also much less burdened by debt than before.

So colleges are not choosing to invest their newfound wealth in staff. The result of this sustained underinvestment and wage suppression - a recruitment crisis.

UCU website link

https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/13153/English-FE-finances-to-2022?utm_source=lyr-campaignupdate&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=members&utm_term=all-members&utm_content=The+Friday+email:+8+September+2023

The UCU website is not easy to navigate, so I have provided the link above.

Jo Corke SW RMB

Fiscal drag

Fiscal drag is when tax bands and tax free allowances do not go up as much as inflation. When they are frozen and there is an inflation rate higher than 0, then more people are paying some tax, more people are paying 40% tax, and everyone who is paying tax is paying more of it than they would have if all these allowances have been increased at the rate of inflation.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9687/>

<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-facts/what-is-fiscal-drag/>

<https://www.tutor2u.net/economics/topics/fiscal-drag>

Just in case you were wondering.

10. 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>



11. 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

12. Editor's Note.

Contributions to the newsletter are welcome.

Jo Corke SW RMB

END

